BESIDE THEMSELVES:
SHAKESPEAR’S ECSTATIC SUBJECTS

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DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

Jennifer Edwards
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‘Ecstasy’: the term’s usage spans the timeline of Shakespeare’s canon, registering for the first time in *The Comedy of Errors* (1589) and last in *The Tempest* (1611), a temporal range that suggests Shakespeare’s sustained interest in the word and the state it denotes. Derived from the Greek ek-stasis—*ek* (out of, away from, beyond) and *histanai* (to place, to stand)—the term translates as a flight of the soul from the body. Taking this as its working definition, but complicating the word’s valence by examining it in a number of literary and non-literary contexts, ‘Beside Themselves: Shakespeare’s Ecstatic Subjects’ examines characters made abject and alienated from their normal states, thrown beside or outside of themselves by love, grief, anger, rapture, trance, and intoxication. This thesis therefore explores artistic, religious, and philosophical conceptions and representations of ecstasy in works of the early modern period. More specifically, it considers how depictions of the ecstatic condition in Renaissance literature are informed by their classical, medical, theological, and intellectual contexts, to demonstrate how moments of profound selflessness—of self-loss or self-division—are, paradoxically, symptomatic of and central to an early modern conception of interiority. In doing so, it illustrates that, for the Renaissance writer, ecstasy was not only a term denoting religious rapture, but rather had the capacity to be more broadly employed as an umbrella term denoting a range of subjective experiences. To consider ecstasis—a moment of extreme elation or radical desertion—is to consider the Renaissance subject *in extremis*, caught in what this thesis demonstrates to be a characteristic crisis moment of simultaneous autonomy and abjection.
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TEXTS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Shakespeare’s plays and poetry are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al., 3rd edn (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016). References to *Hamlet* and *Othello* are to the Arden Third Series. All emphasis in quotations is original unless otherwise indicated. Play titles have been abbreviated according to the standard, traditional abbreviations of Shakespeare’s work, as listed in the *MLA Handbook*.

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1. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, marble and bronze, c.1647-52, Cornaro Chapel, Santa Maria della Vittoria, Rome. 83

2. A stave demonstrating an example of musical syncopation. From René Descartes, *Compendium of Musick* (London, 1653). 175
INTRODUCTION

Standing Outside: Introducing Ecstasy

CRESSIDA I have a kind of self resides with you, But an unkind self that itself will leave.¹

Troth I not know, nor whither, nor bout what; I am so utterly beside my selfe.²

This thesis explores artistic, religious, and philosophical conceptions and representations of ecstasy in works of the early modern period. More specifically, it considers how depictions of the ecstatic condition in Renaissance literature are informed by their philosophical, theological, and medical contexts, in order to demonstrate that these moments of profound selflessness—of self-loss or self-division—are, paradoxically, symptomatic of and central to an early modern conception of interiority and subjective experience. ‘I am … beside my selfe’: as the title of this thesis suggests, this will be a recurring statement in what follows, for it is a recurring sentiment in early modern literature, where subjects compulsively find and assert themselves as being beside or outside of themselves. ‘Besyde them selves and clene out of their wyttes’; ‘sometime transported, and beside them selves’: these are the subjects of this study.³

¹With how many different pleasures, and all perfectly extreme, art thou ravished now, my soule? With what ravishments of joy art thou transported beside thy selfe? In what sweet extasies art thou no[w] wandering?⁴: it is the ‘ability to goe out of [the] selfe’,
to borrow Anglican theologian Richard Sibbes’ formulation (1629), that is captured by
the etymological construction of ‘ecstasy’—derived from the Greek ek- (out of, away from,
beyond) and histanai (to place, to stand). Central to the ecstatic experience is this sense of
departure and displacement. As Judith Butler has it: ‘to be ec-static means, literally, to be
outside oneself’. Taking as its working definition this notion of ecstasy as the experience
of standing outside or beside oneself, this thesis seeks to illuminate an early modern
interest in models of subjectivity that are defined by a painful yet productive displacement
from the norm. To consider ecstasis—a moment of extreme elation or radical
desertion—is to consider the Renaissance subject in extremis, caught in what I will
demonstrate to be its characteristic crisis moment of simultaneous autonomy and
abjection.

I. SHAKESPEARE’S ECSTATIC SUBJECTS

‘Paule thou art beside thy selfe’: in early modern England, ecstasy was a term deeply
rooted in Christian thought, one that the Church had inherited from its classical
counterparts. ‘For centuries before Erasmus’, M. A. Screech observes in his study of
estasy in The Praise of Folly, ‘ecstasy had come to mean the state of a Christian who had
been raptured outside of [themselves]’, a state in which the subject would abandon their
body in order to allow their spirit to connect with the divine: ‘I was in the spirit, that is, I
was in a trance or ecstasie, and there received a vision, a revelation from God’. As

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7 Augustin Marlorat, A Catholike and Ecclesiasticall Exposition of the Holy Gospell after S. Marke and Luke,
Hammond, A Paraphrase and Annotations upon all the Books of the New Testament (London: by James
Flesher, 1659), p. 591.
Catholic theologian St. François de Sales notes:

Ecstasy is called rapture … because through it God draws us and raises us up to him; and rapture is called ecstasy in that, by it, we come out of ourselves, remain out of ourselves and above ourselves, in order to unite ourselves with God.9

By this logic, all raptures are ecstasies, and vice versa. But for the early modern subject, ‘ecstasy’ no longer simply connoted a rapturous, self-fulfilling encounter with the divine. Instead, it became a term that encompassed a variety of more prosaic experiences, from falling in love to drunken or medical madness.

Looking to the period’s most famous playwright, we find that the term ‘ecstasy’ spans the entire timeline of Shakespeare’s canon, registering first in The Comedy of Errors (1589) and last in The Tempest (1611): a temporal range that suggests a sustained interest in the word and the state it denotes. Yet, as a quick survey of Shakespeare’s usage of the term demonstrates, the state described is a varied and complex one. Take Ross in Macbeth, for example, for whom ‘a modern ecstasy’ is a ‘violent sorrow’ (IV.iii.170-1), just as the woman in ‘A Lover’s Complaint’, beside herself with misery, is described as ‘suffering ecstasy’ (l. 69). In both cases, ‘ecstasy’ is at odds not only with the Christian model articulated above, but also with our ‘modern’ understanding of the term as meaning ‘intense delight’.10 More puzzling still are moments where Shakespeare’s uses of the term seem to be at odds with each other. When, for instance, Shakespeare describes Venus as ‘stand[ing] in trembling ecstasy’ (Vén., 895) in Venus and Adonis, he is marking out an experience quite different from that of Antipholus of Ephesus who also ‘trembles in his ecstasy’ in The Comedy of Errors (IV.iv.46). At first glance, it seems that these instances refer to the same kind of ecstatic experience, one that manifests itself in the same way upon

9 François de Sales, Oeuvres, cit. Screech, Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly, p. 57.
the body, with both cases depicting an intensity of emotion that leaves these subjects with "senses all dismayed" (Vén., 896) and needing to "establish ... true sense again" (Err., IViv.43). But these emotions, and the ecstasies these characters suffer as a result, are notably different. For Venus, the term signals momentary, fear-induced paralysis; she "stands in trembling ecstasy" because, as the term etymologically suggests, her mind or spirit stands forth from her body, leaving her in a state of suspension. But when the Courtesan "marks how [Antipholus] trembles in his ecstasy" as he beats his servant Dromio, she observes an ecstasy brought about by anger, not fear. Rather than leaving Antipholus paralysed, this flurry of emotion throws Antipholus into a frenzy: "is not your husband mad?" (Err., IViv.40). As one subject experiences an angered fit, the other is thrown into momentary pause: as fear or anger, ecstasy here demonstrates its capacity to span an emotional scale, implicating characters as being "beside themselves" to quite different measures, and to quite different dramatic effect.

This thesis, therefore, explores "ecstasy" as a word and state that encompasses a wide range of senses. It is at once something to be feared—"hinder them from what this ecstasy | May now provoke them to" (Tmp., III.iii.108-9)—and something to be wary of: "this is the very ecstasy of love" (Ham., II.i.103). It can be tortuous—"better be with the dead ... | Than on the torture of the mind to lie | in restless ecstasy" (Mac., III.ii.21-24)—and threateningly impassioned: "O love, be moderate! Allay thy ecstasy ... I feel too much thy blessing! Make it less ..." (MV, III.ii.111-113). Most commonly, however, as we glimpsed in Antipholus’ ecstasy, it is a state associated with frenzied madness:

GERTRUDE | This is the very coinage of the brain.
This bodiless creation ecstasy
Is very cunning in.

HAMLET | Ecstasy?
My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time,

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11 This dichotomy between sense and ecstasy is illustrated again by Hamlet’s assertion that "sense to ecstasy was né’er so thralled" (III.vi.72), as he tries to convince his mother that he is not mad.
And makes as heathful music. It is not madness
That I have uttered.  

(Ham., III.iv.128-133)

To gloss ‘ecstasy’ simply as ‘madness’ is, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate, necessarily reductive. We saw above just how varied the ecstatic experience could be, and Hamlet alone unshackles it from a stable meaning: here we hear of ‘the very ecstasy of love’, but also discover what it means to be ‘blasted with ecstasy’. In a play that resists reductive diagnosis and privileges semantic and ontological uncertainty, it is apt that ecstasy defies neat categorisation and instead represents a state that effaces clear distinction.

Furthermore, as Hamlet rejects an ecstatic diagnosis by evidencing his pulse, he invites us to consider ecstasy as not merely a ‘coinage of the brain’ as Gertrude has it, but as an experience that registers itself on the body. Indeed, when Doctor Pinch is urged by Adriana to assess Antipholus—to ‘attend him in his ecstasy’ (Tit., IV.i.124)—he similarly suggests a link between ecstasy and heart-rate: ‘Give me your hand, and let me feel your pulse’ (Err., IV.iv.47). For Shakespeare, very simply, ecstasy was an experience that affected both mind and body, the consequences of which become graphically dramatized in Othello:

OTHELLO Lie with her? Lie on her? We say ‘lie on her’ when they belie her. Lie with her? ‘Swounds, that’s fulsome! Handkerchief-confessions-handkerchief? To confess, and be hanged for his labour? First to be hanged and then to confess. I tremble at it … It is not words that shakes me thus …  

[He] falls in a trance

(IV.i.34-40, emphasis added)

12 Ecstasy is most frequently glossed as ‘madness’ by modern editors—in The Norton Shakespeare, ‘madness’ and ‘frenzy’ are the most common glosses, as seen in The Tempest, Macbeth, The Comedy of Errors, Hamlet, and Titus Andronicus. The exceptions to this are Hamlet II.i (‘insanity’), Venus and Adonis (‘stupor’), Macbeth (where ‘modern ecstasy’ is described as a ‘commonplace emotion’), and Othello, where the term is clarified as meaning ‘for your fit’.

13 A further sense of ecstasy as extremity or extremis is hinted at by the textual variations between different versions of Hamlet. In Q1 and F1, Polonius’ revelation here that in his youth he ‘suffered much extremity for love, very near this’, is for Corambis in Q2 an assertion of ‘the vehemency of love, and when I was young I was very idle and suffered much ecstasy in love’ (II.i.224-5). See Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2006).
What for Venus and Antipholus was a ‘trembling ecstasy’ is experienced with increased intensity in *Othello*, as the Moor collapses and ‘fall[s] into an epilepsy’ (47) or ecstatic trance. ‘I … laid good ’scuse upon your ecstasy’ (77), Iago tells Othello as he recovers, conflating ecstatic and epileptic fits. Ecstasy, then, is not just an intense emotional state which describes subjects as being beside themselves in anger, fear, passion, or anxiety, but is also presented as having physiological consequences. Informed and intrigued by these various experiences, this thesis explores what it means to ‘suffer ecstasy’, and what is at stake for those Shakespearean subjects who encounter this altered state.

II. METHODOLOGY: ECSTATIC SUBJECTS IN CONTEXT

In order to situate Shakespeare’s ecstatic subjects in context, this study offers sustained analysis of how early modern writers—both literary and non-literary—conceived of and represented the ecstatic experience. As for Shakespeare, ecstasy captured the imaginations of early modern literary writers as a state that denoted ‘fantastick Dotage, Madnesse, Phrenzy, Rupture of mere imagination’, as Corax observes in John Ford’s *The Lover’s Melancholy* (first published 1629).14 It also provided a metaphorical framework through which to articulate a range of experiences from kissing and sexual encounter, to the sending of letters; ‘I make account that this writing of letters’, asserts John Donne, whose sustained interest in the ecstatic experience is given due consideration below, ‘is a kind of extasie, and a departure and secession and suspension of the soul, which doth then communicate itself to two bodies’. ‘So for these extasies in letters’, Donne continues, pushing his analogy further, ‘I oftentimes deliver myself over in writing’.15 Lady Macbeth,

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too, will consider the potential of letters in these ecstatically affective terms: ‘Thy letters have transported me beyond | This ignorant present, and I feel now | The future in the instant’ (Mac., I.v.54-6). Ecstasy, considered in these terms, can transport subjects through time and space. Elsewhere, in *The View of France* (1604), travel writer Robert Dallington similarly employs the dynamics of ecstasy, but to articulate the state of France during its recent civil wars: ‘See here a Country in an extacie, distracted in her selfe, and transported out of herselhe, ready to fall into a falling sicknesse, like the soule of a distempered man’.

This notion of collective, political ecstasis is similar to the malady—‘a modern ecstasy’—which Ross observes as afflicting Scotland in *Macbeth*: ‘Alas, poor country! | Almost afraid to know itself’ (IV.iii.164-5; 170). With these metaphorical applications comes a hint of the violent displacement that ecstasy can enact. This was an experience, in short, that provided a way of thinking not only about the relationship between soul and body, but also about interpersonal relationships, about issues of movement, and about the mutability of self: ‘Ecstasy utterly alters me’, as Homer’s translator has it.

As well as considering the word and state itself, therefore, this study explores ecstasy’s metaphorical potential.

Another writer whose voice is heard alongside these period poets, dramatists, essayists, and theologians, is Helkiah Crooke, physician to King James I and author of the highly influential anatomical treatise *Microcosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man* (1615). This extensive work proved popular in the marketplace, reprinted in 1616 and 1618 before going to a second edition in 1631 and third edition in 1651. Representing and reconsidering the established work and thought of key medical figures such as Galen,
as Eve Keller describes, Crooke rewrites these works ‘to support a notion of subjectivity more neatly aligned with ... humanist ideals’: an ontology predicated upon analysis, confession, self-scrutiny, and rational understanding.\textsuperscript{20} We saw above how the bodies of Shakespeare’s ecstatic subjects are often implicated in their experiences—variously trembling, shaking, and having their pulse felt—and what Crooke’s study provides is a guide through which to consider the role of and implications for the bodies of those who ‘suffer ecstasy’. While ecstasy is primarily understood to be a mental, emotional state, this thesis also demonstrates the extent to which that experience was bound up with the body.

My approach, therefore, is one that brings together a variety of early modern voices, voices which contribute to our understanding of Shakespeare’s engagement with the ecstatic.

This thesis also brings an historical context into dialogue with modern theoretical perspectives on the ecstatic experience, an approach which offers a unique consideration of the virtues and dangers of ecstatic subjectivity. In \textit{The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies}, for instance, philosopher Michel Serres pauses over what it means to stand outside:

\begin{quote}
By extending myself precariously I exist. … Existence, or ecstasy, throws itself outwards, projects itself unsure-footed. … First security, then abandon. The I only exists outside of the I. The I only thinks when outside of the I. It really feels when outside of itself. … I only really live outside of myself; outside of myself I think, meditate, know; outside of myself I receive what is given, enduringly; I invent outside of myself. Outside of myself, I exist, as does the world.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

For Serres’ sensitive subject, this is an experience worth celebrating, one that ecstatically immerses the subject in the world. He, in other words, welcomes influence, and advocates connectivity:

\begin{quote}
Lost, dissolved in the transparent air, flowing with its every variation, sensitive to its shallowest comas, shivering at the slightest breeze, given over to the world
\end{quote}


and mingling with its outburst, thus do I exist.22

Existence, in these terms, is in some crucial sense ecstatic: to step out of oneself (ex) and to open oneself up to the influence of the world is a paradoxical part of, to adopt Stephen Greenblatt’s famous term, self-fashioning: existence involves acts of self-extension, however precarious they may be. For the early modern subjects of this study who variously desire to be ‘dissolved into ecstasies’, to experience the ecstasy of divine influence, or to mingle with the beloved in erotic union, Serres’ model of ecstatic openness feels not at an anachronistic remove, but rather distinctly familiar.

In what follows, then, I incorporate these theoretical voices into the texture of this study, for they offer models through which to explore the constitution and dissolution of identity in terms that not only prove germane to the present discussion of ecstasy, but are often compatible with early modern thought. It is in these circumstances that Donne’s consideration of the dynamics of ecstasy in terms of letter exchange finds its modern correlative in Jacques Derrida’s claim that ‘I address myself to you, somewhat as if I were sending myself’. In a similar manner, French physician Marin Cureau de la Chambre’s study of the ‘Syncope and Extasies which sometimes happen to Lovers’ is complemented by Catherine Clément’s interest in the syncopic subject and the philosophy of rapture: ‘when the subject melts into syncope, into ecstasy; into jouissance, it crosses with a leap, the limits of its own sex, and finds itself in the other’.23 At times, therefore, this study allows the early modern ecstatic subject to be placed in dialogue with these modern subjects, as well as Julia Kristeva’s abject subject, Georges Bataille’s erotic subject, or the jouissant subject of Roland Barthes. Additionally, other contemporary theorists such as Jean

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22 Serres, The Five Senses, p. 56.
Baudrillard, Judith Butler, Luce Irigary, and Jean-Luc Nancy reflect on the ecstatic experience itself. Their work suggests the value of welcoming the ecstatic risk, of recognising and embracing human existence as, in Butler’s terms, ‘precarious life’. Owing to this strong theoretical influence, this study asks, as Butler does, ‘what claims us … such that we are not the masters of ourselves? To what are we tied? And by what are we seized?’ Following these lines of enquiry, this thesis will consider the role of the ecstatic experience in the fashioning of both early modern and modern identities. For these theorists, the passage from and distance between self and other or, indeed, self and self, remains an expanse to be mapped and measured: ‘an expanse that seems to transgress all boundaries’. Such is the quest for the self, a kind of subjective geography that this thesis embraces in its exploration of those boundaries.

Identifying ecstasy as a state that brings the subject towards and beyond its boundaries, this thesis contributes to the burgeoning body of scholarship considering emotional and subjective experience in early modern studies. Indeed, in the introduction to their recent collection of essays on The Renaissance of Emotion, Erin Sullivan and Richard Meek identify a “Renaissance of emotion” in the field, with scholars across various disciplines turning their attention to the centrality of emotion (or passion, or affect …) in all aspects of early modern literary, dramatic, cultural and political life.


25 This notion, as its title suggests, is central to Butler’s Precarious Life.

26 Butler, Precarious Life, p. 21.

27 Irigaray, p. 24.

28 Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan (eds.), The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 3. Tracing through the lines of enquiry put forth in highly influential studies such as Michael Schoenfeldt’s
Furthermore, this study uses the ecstatic experience as a means to thinking about Renaissance subjectivity more broadly. Like Erin Sullivan’s *Beyond Melancholy* and Carol Thomas Neely’s *Distracted Subjects*, this thesis explores early modern conceptions of subjectivity through a particular word or state. While it observes subjects in states of ecstasy, it also gestures further as to how we might identify an ecstatic state of being: one whereby the act of standing outside and projecting the self beyond its own borders, renders the subject simultaneously open to and at risk from that which lies beyond it.

What the ecstatic model offers, I suggest, is a means of exploring the subject’s two-way negotiation of that which is pleasurable, and that which can cause it pain. Ecstasy, as we will see in what follows, is an experience that blurs such distinctions. As such, in addition to the theoretical perspectives identified above, the ‘ecstatic subject’ of this study necessarily engages with and shares in the experiences of James Kuzner’s ‘open subject’, Eric Langley’s ‘sympathetic subject’, Timothy Reiss’ ‘passible subject’, and Nancy Selleck’s ‘interpersonal’ subject. Like Rodolphe Gasché’s subject, the ecstatic subject is ‘outgoing’; like Cynthia Marshall’s ‘dispersive self’, it risks ‘self-shattering’.

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31 Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore:
these subjects is an awareness of their own boundaries, and of how self is constituted by those boundaries.

What an examination of the ecstatic experience provides, I will demonstrate, is a model through which to re-examine Renaissance ‘Ipseity, or Selfness’. If ecstasy enables the subject to unite with the divine or the beloved—to glimpse heaven or to become ‘one’ with another more completely—that experience necessarily requires a going out of the self. ‘Indeed’, as Sibbes has it, ‘wee are never our selves perfectly, till we have wholly put off our selves’. Identifying the ecstatic experience as one that ‘pulled toward opposite extremes of dissolution and coherence’—where, in Sibbes terms, the claim to self occurs through the experience of having put it off—this study understands ecstasy in the terms which, as Marshall has suggested, ‘defined the emerging subject’. Acknowledging that with ecstatic self-division comes the risk of irrecoverable fracture, I share Marshall’s interest in the ways that the subject might be constituted by such experiences of painful subjection. Such shattering of the self, this thesis agrees, can be a crucial stage in the formation of the subject. Observing both the Renaissance impulse to negate selfhood—to ‘put it off’ in Sibbes’ terms—and the subsequent impulse towards self-destruction and annihilation in Renaissance literature, Marshall’s The Shattering of the Self demonstrates the central role of violence in early modern conceptions of subjectivity. Advocating ‘the instability of the emergent subject’, Marshall observes in the early modern period ‘a selfhood fundamentally challenged by the call to autonomy and by the terms that necessarily structure the autonomy in social interactions’.

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The term ‘ipseity’, from the Latin ipse (self), will be used throughout the following discussion of Renaissance senses of selfhood. Walter Charleton, The Darknes of Atheism (London: by J. F., 1652), p. 171.


Marshall, p. 54.
For Kuzner, as for historians of selfhood such as Charles Taylor, Jerrold Seigel, and Timothy Reiss, the emergent, modern self is one ‘whose boundaries become increasingly well fortified’: it is in becoming bounded that the subject becomes more modern.\textsuperscript{36} Understood in these terms, Kuzner argues, the early modern subject has limited options: wound or be wounded, maintain control over oneself or be controlled, obliterated, by the other.\textsuperscript{37} In his study of \textit{Open Subjects}, Kuzner reconsiders this dichotomy by situating the vulnerable, unbounded subject in opposition to its violent, bounded counterpart. While Marshall’s modern subject is constituted through violence, increasingly aware of, and anxious about, its own borders, Kuzner’s open subject is, like Selleck’s, ‘plunged into intersubjectivity’.\textsuperscript{38} For these subjects, ‘violence [is] implausible, maybe even unthinkable, since the elements that often precede violence—for example the inflexible boundaries between self and other that permit self-hardening and aggression—are no longer in place’.\textsuperscript{39} Kuzner thus contrasts the dangers of bounded existence with the virtues of vulnerability, charting the capacity for openness in the formation of the social self. What these studies bring into focus, then, are two models of early modern subjectivity: one that is constituted through the experience of self-shattering, the other constituted through the experience of self-opening. As one shatters, the other flexes.

Like the open individual, an ecstatic subject moves beyond the rigid divisions between bodies demarcated by the notion of a bounded, autonomous existence. I approach terms like ‘individual’ with caution, since this thesis repeatedly demonstrates that the subject is not in-divisible (un-dividable), but instead highlights experiences that suggest the contrary: that individuals could be divisible, and that such an experience

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{36} Kuzner, p. 4.
  \item \textsuperscript{37} Kuzner, p. 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{38} Kuzner, p. 108.
  \item \textsuperscript{39} Kuzner, p. 108.
\end{itemize}
could be as blissful as it could be agonising. While ecstasy can be profoundly pleasurable and rewarding, to risk the danger of ecstasy is to risk the irrecoverable fracture and dissolution of the self. ‘Beside Themselves’ thus situates itself between these explorations of Renaissance subjectivity, considering ipseic structures through a term that encompasses simultaneous loss and gain, violence and vulnerability, observing the tender subject in sufferance but also in bliss. Ecstasy, in other words, cuts both ways.

This thesis also shares Selleck’s interest in the ways in which we are, to borrow a phrase from Donne, ‘involved in’ others. Selleck’s choice and use of the term ‘interpersonal’, as opposed to ‘relational’ or ‘intersubjective’, reflects her study’s focus on the recognition of ‘the plurality of persons involved’ in the formation of the Renaissance ‘self’. Yet while ‘a great deal of … criticism addresses the alienated “other” in early modern culture’, Selleck notes that the ways in which this otherness structures Renaissance selfhood have been largely ignored. She thus establishes a relational model of the self that builds upon Stephen Greenblatt’s seminal *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, in that it seeks to blur sharp distinctions between self and other. This thesis participates in that endeavour insofar as it understands self-fashioning as ‘achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange, or hostile’, as Greenblatt has it. Where this study augments these discussions, however, is in its consideration of what is at stake when this ‘alien’ is oneself; it considers not only the alien other, but also self-alienation. Characterized as ‘a true alienation’—‘soe strange an … alienation of the mind’, as priest and author Henry Hawkins (1577-1646) notes—ecstasy involved for the early modern subject a radical departure from self. As French clergyman David Blondel (1591-1665)  

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41 Selleck, p. 11.
42 Selleck, p. 2.
articulates, and as this study will demonstrate in due course, such loss of self was deeply ingrained in notions of religious identity: ‘Neither Peter, nor John, nor James were sensible of the Vision of God without a denial of Reason, and alienation of spirit; for which we maintain … that Ecstasie, that is, alienation of spirit, is consistent with Grace’. The experience of ecstasy was one of deliberate alienation.

While I join the above critics as they assert the primacy of interactions with the other as prerequisite encounters for knowing the self, I narrow my focus to explore the ways in which the subject knows itself by becoming other to itself. Ecstasy, as this thesis demonstrates, figures itself as both a public and intensely private experience. While Selleck takes Cressida’s line ‘I have a kind of self resides with you’ (Tro., III.ii.143) as her point of departure—a line exemplifying an interpersonal ‘kind of self’ predicated upon one’s relationship with another—it is Cressida’s further assertion of ‘an unkind self that itself will leave’ (144) that is also of interest to me here, because it hints at the subject’s capacity to depart and stand outside of itself. ‘We are’, as Montaigne puts it, ‘never in ourselves, but beyond’. It is around these statements, and their various manifestations and implications within early modern literature, that the study rotates, charting and exploring the ecstatic experience as a crucial stage in the formation of the subject. While Claude Lévi-Strauss might argue that ‘the ultimate goal of the human sciences is not to constitute but to dissolve man’, this thesis argues that constitution and dissolution ought not to be seen as opposing forces. This study therefore investigates Renaissance self-fashioning, but it also recognises that such a venture necessitates an exploration of the undoing of the Renaissance self.

III. ‘SHAKESPEARE’S ECSTATIC SUBJECTS’: CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This thesis encounters ecstasy in myriad forms, for the significance of ‘ecstasy’ is that it serves as an umbrella term for a number of lived and felt experiences: from divine inspiration, to sexual union, to violent medical seizure. Broadly speaking, these various kinds of ecstatic experience govern the chapters of this thesis. That said, these chapters ought not to be taken simply as discrete examinations of what it meant to experience ecstasy, but rather as an attempt to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the ecstatic state more broadly: what an ecstatic subject might gain from taking such a step outside of themselves, and what is at stake in that endeavour. Accordingly, this study first charts the ecstatic experience from its earliest conceptions, exploring its roots in classical Greek and early Christian thought. My first chapter introduces notions of mania, furor, and frenzy through key works such as the Pythagorean doctrine on the transmigration of the soul, Plato’s Phaedrus, and Longinus’ On the Sublime. These are works and concepts which heavily informed early modern conceptions of the ecstatic experience, and therefore establish some of the key philosophical motivations for taking a step outside of oneself. This prehistory identifies different types of ecstatic experience (from the violent to the blissful), and broadens the ecstatic lexicon to include a range of words, states, and properties that will resonate throughout this thesis more broadly.

Chapter Two explores early modern narratives of religious ecstasy from St. Augustine and St. Teresa of Avila, to John Donne, George Herbert, and Richard Crawshaw. Here we encounter subjects who share a desire to journey outside of themselves in order to enter into union with the divine: to surrender and lose themselves in hopes of returning ‘home’ to God. Establishing the period’s commonplace religious narratives of ecstasy, this chapter considers the ways in which Shakespeare, whose work
seldom engages explicitly with religious texts, can be seen to inherit the contemporary language of ecstatic aspiration. Taking *Hamlet*’s Claudius and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’s Bottom as test-cases, the final section of this chapter explores ecstasy in spatial terms in order to demonstrate how the dynamics of faith in these works are symptomatic of the force dynamics at play in these texts more broadly, where pathways of devotion are literalized in the movements of the Shakespearean subject.

Having established Shakespeare’s interest in the ecstatic experience to be at one remove from its divine context, Chapters Three and Four provide extended readings of what it means to ‘suffer ecstasy’ in the early modern period. Chapter Three identifies the similarities between how the period articulated ecstasy and sexual experience, exploring moments of ‘little death’ in Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Reading these texts alongside contemporary medical discourses of erotic and amorous experience, this chapter demonstrates ecstasy to be an intensely physical experience: capable of leaving the amorous subject quaking with orgasmic pleasure, or trembling with fear; one which could have the pulse racing, or stop it altogether. In other words, this chapter observes subjects who do not, in Hamlet’s terms, ‘temperately keep time’ (*Ham.*, III.iv.142). Chapter Four explores more fully what it means to ‘suffer ecstasy’ through a consideration of how the etymological sense of ‘ecstasy’ as displacement (of standing or being placed outside) contributes to the fractured models of subjectivity that are presented in *The Comedy of Errors* and *Othello*. In so doing, this chapter carries previous discussions of embodiment through to a consideration of ecstasy as a medical state, moving from a consideration of ecstasy as an experience of *petite mort*, to a kind of *le petit mal*: from subjects who are ‘distempered’ because they fail to keep time, to those who suffer a ‘distemperature’ of the brain. What elsewhere are the trembling pleasures of divine and erotic rapture, here become translated into the convulsive tremors of medical
seizure. More specifically, this discussion situates Othello’s trance alongside period discourses of ecstasy and epilepsy in order to both demonstrate the previously unexplored similarity between these states, and to suggest how this ecstatic experience reflects the play’s depiction of models of self-fracturing. Having established in Chapters Two and Three ecstasy as an experience that unites two subjects into one, Chapter Four considers the virtues and dangers of ecstatic subjectivity, when those dynamics of union and division are played out in a ‘dialogue of one’ (Donne, ‘The Extasie’, 74).

This thesis, the first full-length study of the ecstatic experience in Shakespeare’s works, demonstrates how ecstasy could be experienced in different ways, for different lengths of time, through different parts of the body, and in different directions. Indeed, as we will see in the chapters that follow, this is an experience that can be read along both a vertical and horizontal axis (be it an aspirational journey towards heavenly bliss, the movement to and from a lover, or a path that leads from the city to a world outside its gates). The subjects of this study therefore reveal what it really means to be beside oneself. ‘I am ... beside myself’, this study contends, is not simply the statement of a character in high distress, but is perhaps a claim we should all be able to make.
CHAPTER ONE

Ecstatic Subjects: A Prehistory

Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover and the poet
Are of imagination all compact:
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,
That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:
The poet’s eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name. 

(MND, V.1.4-17)

Theseus’ famous speech in the closing stages of A Midsummer Night’s Dream brings together three distracted subjects: ‘[t]he lunatic, the lover, and the poet’. For Theseus, what unites the first two is their ‘seething brains’, agitated minds that are boiling hot (OED, ‘seething’, adj., 1a.) and as such are likely to spill over, to seethe out and away from the body. In stark contrast to ‘cool reason’, it is this distempered mind that gives way to ‘shaping fantasies’. As the poet joins their ranks, the pair become a trio who are able to see things differently: who ‘apprehend more’. What these subjects share, in other words, is an over-active imagination, minds that wander too freely, such that elsewhere in the canon will leave characters ‘wax[ing] desperate’ (Ham., Liv.87), ‘trembl[ling]’ (Ven., 668), or at risk of ‘los[ing] | The knowledge of themselves’ (Ls., IV.vi.276-7). Accordingly, there lies in these depictions of ‘frantic’ madness a sense that ‘the heightened imagination fuelled by passion’ was one that was, as Margaret Healy observes, associated ‘with considerable danger’.1 These are minds that are unnaturally heightened, restless, agitated. And yet to

be ‘frantic’, in the terms that Theseus describes it, is not necessarily a negative experience: to have a wandering mind, or to have a roaming soul, could be to experience a ‘fine frenzy’. In these altered states, the subject might well ‘see … devils’, but they might also see ‘Helen’s beauty’, ‘glance heaven’, and discover ‘the forms of things unknown’. What unites ‘the lunatic, the lover, and the poet’, is that their minds are able to transport them beside themselves, for better or for worse. What follows is an exploration of what it means to be drawn beyond these confines.

‘The lunatic, the lover and the poet’: borrowing Theseus’ categories, this chapter provides a broadly chronological prehistory of the early modern ecstatic subject in order to demonstrate how early modern writers—from theologians and philosophers to physicians, playwrights, and poets—inherited from classical philosophy a sense of what it meant to ‘suffer ecstasy’ (LC, 64). Moving from conceptions of divine and loving ecstasy, to a consideration of ecstasy as an intensely physiological experience, the sections of this chapter reflect the various kinds of ecstasy explored in each of the chapters that follow. As we shall see, the subjects that Theseus draws together were not only ‘compact’ in their imaginative capacities—able to ‘apprehend’ and ‘see more’—but were frequently bound together in classical and early modern discourses as subjects whose souls could freely depart their bodies in search of something beyond. These are the ecstatic subjects of this study.

91 (174).
I. UNDER THE INFLUENCE; OR, ‘THE LUNATIC’

Let us be driven by the Socratic frenzies, which so may place us outside of our minds, that they will place our minds and ourselves in God …

Our history of ecstasy begins in ancient Greece with those who worshipped Dionysus, or ‘the grapegod Bacchus’ as Ovid’s Pythagoras calls him; ‘hee was’, as English poet and translator Richard Linche tells us, ‘knowne and called by diverse and severall names, as sometimes Bacchus, sometimes Dionisius’. This ‘monarch of the vine’ (Ant., II.vii.108) introduced his subjects—most commonly referred to as Bacchanals or Maenads—to divine intoxication and madness, ‘discouer[ing] vnto men… the manner of gathering grapes from the vinetree, and to presse and bruse them together’, and inspiring them towards a divine intoxication brought about by the resultant ‘juice and licour’. ‘The Bacchinalls’, writes Thomas Heywood, ‘were women that were usually drunke in the celebrations of the feasts of Bacchus … extasied in their devine furor’. A product of both liquid and spiritual intoxication, the ‘divine furor’ of ecstasy is prevalent in Bacchic worship. As Linche notes:

Those great feasts, which were called Bacchanalia, were solemnised and kept, at which almost all the women thereabout would meet, drinking and carousing in that abundance and immoderate excesse, as they would become with the force thereof even furiously mad, brainesicke, and wild, with dauncing and leaping, singing loud canticles, beating one another, running among the woods, vallies, and mountaines, and vsing all strange and rude gestures, and behauiours, worse than people extremely mad and lunatike.

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4 Linche, sig. Xiii. ‘These mynsters of Bacchus’, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa notes, were also known ‘as Tyades, Menades, Bacche, Eliades, Mimallonides, Eonides, Eubiades, Bassarides, Triaterides’—A Treatise of the Nobilitie and Excellencye of Woman Kynde, trans. David Clapam (London: by Thomae Bertheleti, 1542), sig. E3.
6 Linche, sig. Yiir.
In these terms, to be ‘extasied in … devine furor’ is to be ‘furiously mad’: to be both ‘inspired [with] frenzy’ (*OED*, ‘furor’, *n*. 2, ‘fury’, *n*. 4), but also to be in a ‘frenzied rage’ (*OED*, ‘fury’, *n*. 1a). ‘Loving to be inspired with such divine madness & fury’, as Plutarch has it, these ‘furious women, who served in the sacrifices of Bacchus’ are open to and under the influence of both vine and ‘grapegod’.7 Under the influence, very simply, because Dionysus was not just the god of wine; he was wine itself; ‘when we pour libations to the gods’, Tiresias tells us in Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, ‘we pour the god of wine himself’.8

It seems apt in these intoxicating circumstances to consider this divine influence in light of critic George Cave’s assertion that ‘drunkenness is the only realm of human experience which can be used to describe the ecstasy of union with God’.9 For what these accounts of the Bacchanals demonstrate is that drunkenness is more than a metaphor for ecstatic union: it is also the catalyst. If ‘the mysterious god [is] hidden within the fibres of the vine’, as Charles Baudelaire suggests in his *Paradis artificiels*, then this god influences—that is, flows into—his followers; they are inspired (*OED*, adj. 3: animated by a divine or supernatural influence) for they are ‘spirited with wine’ (*H5*, III.v.21).10 Put simply, divine inspiration and furor are products of spiritual influence—or inflowance—which in the Bacchic tradition encompassed not only the ‘spirit of Bacchus’, but also ‘spiritts’ which are ‘wine, double distilled’.11 Inspired or in-spirited by an ‘invisible spirit of wine’ (*Oth.*, II.iii.216), Bacchus’ followers have the god flowing within; to be infused

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with spirits is to be enthused—*en* (in), *theos* (god)—by the divine.

Such enthusiastic intoxication played a central role in the worship of Bacchus. When, for instance, French writer Honoré d’Urfé (1568-1625) describes ‘Bacchanals run[ning] thorow the streets raging and storming, full of Enthusiasme of their god’, he describes worshippers at one with the divine.\(^\text{12}\) To have enthusiasm (*ἐνθουσιασμός*; *enthúsiasmus*; *enthousiasme*), to be enthusiastic, is to have god within: ‘a certaine ἐνθοσσισμός and celestiall inspiration … poured into the witte’ of man, as Edmund Spenser has it.\(^\text{13}\) Such is the desire of an ecstatic subject, who abandons their body so that their spirit might connect with the divine; as Anglican theologian Richard Sibbes advises, rehearsing this enthusiastic model through a Christian framework, ‘you must be lost in your selfe that you may be found in [Christ]’.\(^\text{14}\) The benefit of being beside oneself, in these terms, is that is creates a space for the divine to enter into, and so an ecstatic subject necessarily negotiates this two-way exchange. As Michael Rinella observes, ‘extasis and *enthousiasmos* … refer to kindred states [and are] often indistinguishable’, with both signalling states of divinely inspired fury.\(^\text{15}\) These ‘kindred states’ seemingly pull the subject in opposite directions. While ecstasy transports the subject outside of themselves and beyond their confines, the experience of being *in*-spired or *en*-thused signals a counter movement into the self: ecstasy extends the subject outwards; enthusiasm allows for another to enter in. In order to receive the divine, the individual needs to be porous. Crucially for my study, these narratives emphasize the extent to which ecstasy and enthusiasm require that the subject’s borders be permeable, and that the subject be open to influence.


\(^\text{14}\) Sibbes, *The Soule’s Conflict*, p. 47.

As we will see in Chapter Two, for the early modern religious subject, ecstasy offered a rapturous encounter with the divine. But in its early Bacchanalian form, such an encounter was one that was capable of throwing the subject into violent madness. Shakespeare’s ‘Egyptian Bacchanals’ in *Antony and Cleopatra* demonstrate how this intoxicated ecstasy could cut either way:

> Come, thou monarch of the vine,  
> Plumpy Bacchus with pine eyne!  
> In thy fats our cares be drowned,  
> With grapes our hairs be crown’d.  
> Cup us til the world go round  
> Cup us til the world go round.  

(II.vii.111-6)

Temporarily setting their grievances to one side, these ‘sacred rytes’ provide a moment of suspension, bringing Rome and Egypt into a single state of harmonious concord: ‘all take hands’, suggests Antony, ‘Till that the conquering wine hath steeped our sense | In soft and delicate Lethe’ (109-110). And yet to drink and dance in such excess also has the capacity to bring about self-oblivion; ‘strong Enobarb | Is weaker than wine’, complains Caesar, ‘and mine own tongue | splits what it speaks’ (124-6). ‘This wild disguise’, he asserts, ‘hath almost | Antick’d us all’ (122-3); like Hamlet’s ‘antic disposition’ (*Ham.*, I.v.172), alcohol causes them to dispossess themselves. In a play where the stoic confines of the subject are forever at risk of erosion from the liquid influence of Egyptian epicureanism, the literal fumes of wine become metaphorically felt in moments where ‘surfeits’ and ‘lascivious wassails’ (*Ant.*, I.v.27; 56) gradually erode the defined structures of a ‘firm Roman’ (I.v.45), and melt the ‘man of steel’ (IV.v.33) into an increasingly fluid subject.

The Bacchanals are most commonly described as being inspired with a divine fury that makes them ‘brainsicke, and wild … extremely mad and lunaticke’; ‘insanire’,
adds writer John Thorius to his definition of these ‘furious women’. ‘Insanire’, ‘furious’, ‘lunaticke’: these epithets dominate early modern accounts of these ‘women-priests of Bacchus’. If we have thus far understood ecstasy as demanding that the subject be porous, it follows that it is the female subject that is most commonly depicted as being under the influence. For the female body—in Greek thought as in early modern—was understood as being more permeable than its male counterpart: women were understood, as Gail Kern Paster observes in her highly influential study The Body Embarrassed, as a ‘leaky vessel’ and therefore more ‘open, permeable, effluent’ than the ‘closed, opaque, self-contained’ male. As Cleora has it in dramatist Richard Flecknoe’s Erminia: ‘All women are leaking vessels, and can hold nothing, God help them’. This medically informed but ideologically fraught conception of openness was considered all the more true of ‘virginal and maternal bodies’; bodies that, as Tanya Pollard notes in her recent study of Greek tragic women on the early modern stage, ‘suggest a privileged capacity to absorb and transmit; one not yet entered, the other emptied after inhabitation by another body, both serve as conductors for a kind of affective electricity’. More susceptible to divine influence, the female subject demonstrates itself as a more enthusiastic worshipper.

‘Rapt with fury’, writes St. Augustine, these ‘Bacchae’, these ‘raging … women’, committed ‘such fooleries, filthynes and butcheries; for many slaughters were committed in [their] sacrifices’. The savage nature of the cult is depicted in Book III of

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19 Tanya Pollard, Greek Tragic Women on Shakespearean Stages (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 7. Pollard later cites a moment from Longinus’ On the Sublime, where inspired and enthusiastic worship and the maternal body come together: ‘by divine power set down in this way, [the Pythia (a Delphic Oracle)] is impregnated, and delivers oracles through this inspiration’, p. 10.
Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, a book which is itself, in Philip Hardie’s terms, ‘very much under the influence of Bacchus, the god who by its end will have won universal recognition in Thebes’. As ‘the wise Tyresias’ (404) prophesies, King Pentheus’ refusal to worship Bacchus will bring about his violent end:

Another Bacchus Semoles sonne, whom if thou not support  
With pomp and honour like a God, thy carcasse shall be tattered,  
And in a thousand places eke about the Woods be scattered.  
And for to reade thee what they are that shall perfourme the deede,  
It is thy mother and thine Auntie that thus shall make thee bleede.  
I know it shall come to passe, for why thou shalt disdaine,  
To honour Bacchus as a God: and then thou shalt with paine  
Feele how that blinded I am, I sawe for thee too much.  

(654-661)

‘Tattered … scattered; deede … bleede; disdaine … paine’: these unusually insistent rhymes, where words are often nearly identical, mimetically catch the sense that these violent, drunken Bacchic rites could cause individual entities to lose their sense of containment and control. As these semantic units bleed into one another, Ovid’s translator Arthur Golding maps in poetry the extent to which distinctions are lost and edges blur. Paradoxically seeing all too well what Pentheus is too blind to see, Tyresias’ ‘words prove true in deede’ as a ‘newfound Bacchus comes’ and brings with him what is by now a familiar scene:

… the woods and fieldes rebound,  
With noyse of shouts and howling out, and such confused sound.  
The folke runne flocking out by heapes, men, Mayds, and wives together  
The noble men and rascal soret ran gadding also thither,  
The Orgies of this unknowne God full fondley to performe.  

(663; 665-9)

This ‘confused sound’ captures a sense of a sonic barrage which blurs distinct noises, like individual subjects, ‘together’ into one (*OED*, ‘confused’, *adj.* to mingle; not clearly distinguished). In ecstasy, edges are blurred, identities mingle, distinction is lost. Indeed, it is no longer only women who find themselves under the influence of Bacchus, but the

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populace of Thebes at large: his influence is widespread. The ‘noyse of shouts’ and ‘such confused sound’ echo throughout the book; from the ‘noyse of crooked horne’ (673) to the ‘sheepish shrieks of simple women’, to the ‘sound of toying timpanes’ (678), these noises create a soundscape associated with these Bacchic rites, one that will underscore Pentheus’ struggle. Such noise was understood as a defining feature of a certain kind of Bacchic worship known as ‘Corybantism’, the rituals of which Euripides outlines in The Bacchae:

In your caves the triple-
Crested corybantes
Made the rounded timbrel
Tight with hide and beat its
Tense ecstatic jangle
Into the sweetened airs
Breathed by Phrygian-flutes.
They gave it in the hand of
Mother Rhea to drum-beat
Shouting bacchants raving

Once again, the poetry used to describe these moments neatly encapsulates the state it describes, as the ‘[t]ense ecstatic jangle’ of this musical ritual is articulated through ‘tense’ and compressed line of poetry that is itself ‘jangl[ing]’ and ‘tight’. Inducing a rhythmic ‘compulsion’ in its hearers—‘mov[ing] the hearers to collection’ (Ham. IV.v.8-9)—the ‘ecstatic jangle’ that accompanies the wild, enthusiastic rites could render the subject, as Longinus asserts, from whom we shall hear more later, ‘out of their mind … and full of Corybantic frenzy’. Music is after all, as Robert Burton would later write in his Anatomy of Melancholy, ‘so powerful a thing that it ravisheth the soul … and carries it beyond itself’, and for Ovid these disorderly, ‘confused’ sounds are able to at once both reflect and

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22 Ovid will also employ this soundscape to evoke memories the cult in Book VI, where the ‘tinking sound of pots and pans’ (III.673) is echoed in the ‘tincling pannes and pots’ (VI.750).
enhance the distempered interior states of these Bacchanals. This ‘ecstatic jangle’ thus presents a negative forerunner to theologian Richard Hooker’s assertion that using music with psalms might ‘carrieth as it were into extasies, filling the minde with an heavenly joy, and for the time, in a manner, severing it from the body’. While it would later be described as a pleasant severance between body and soul, there is considerable violence in ecstasy’s Bacchic origins.

Such noises are a defining feature of these Bacchic rites. Like the alcohol that inspired them, dissonant sound flows into the ear and moves Bacchanals to distraction. As Ovid’s Pentheus advances towards these Bacchic ‘holic rites’ (Metamorphoses, III.896), the soundscape is filled with ‘loud confused sounds of Bacchus drunken throngs’ (887), ‘bloudie Trumpe’ (888) and ‘noyse of howling loud’ (891); frantic sounds which reach a crescendo as the frantic deeds of these ‘frenticke folke’ (892) intensify:

And like a Bedlem first of all she doth upon him runne,
And with hir Javeling furiously she first doth wound hir sonne.
Come hither sisters come she cries, he is that mighty Bore,
Here is the Bore that stroyes our fields, him will I strike therefore.
With that they fall upon him all as though they had bene mad,
And clustring all upon a heape fast after him they gad.
He quakes and shakes…

(III.898-904)


But drive farr off the barbarous dissonance
Of Bacchus and his Revellers, the Race
Of that wilde Rout that tore the Thracian Bard
In Rhodope, where Woods and Rocks had Eares
To rapture, till the savage clamor dround
Both Harp and Voice … (VII, 32-8)


27 In addition to discordant music, the exclamation ‘Evoe!’ is also understood as a Bacchanalian exclamation, ‘a noise which Bacchus his Priests did use: because it is reported that Bacchus and those women that followed him did use this acclamation or cry’—Gerhard Mercator, Historia Mundi (London: by T. Coles, 1635), p. 808. ‘My soule doth Evoe utter’, writes Horace in his ‘Ode to Bacchus’, ‘and my brest | Fall gorg’d with Wine, doth rumblingly egest | Evoe’—Odes and Epodes of Horace, trans. Henry Rider (London: by John Haviland, 1638), p. 55.
With bloody hands these ‘wicked women’ (918) tear their ‘newfound sacrifice’ (920) limb from limb, head from torso, inaugurating the worship of Bacchus in Thebes. Here we see the dangers of ecstasy, of becoming one with god, especially when that god is Bacchus; intoxication, both physical and spiritual, is presented as a state which, as Marty Roth writes in his study of drunkenness, ‘either enables man to outdo himself or turns him into a brute, that introduces him to ecstasy or plunges him into bestiality’. In ecstasy, one can either enthusiastically find oneself through divine inspiration, or lose oneself completely.

But the line that separates ecstasy from bestiality, as Roth writes, is a fine one, and for those who worshipped the god of ecstasy himself, it could all too easily be dissolved. Such is the case for Orpheus, a priest and philosopher whose violent fate resonates throughout the classical canon and into medieval and Renaissance literature. It is this Bacchic unruliness that Shakespeare’s Theseus is unwilling to admit to his wedding ritual—indeed the play has by now begun to silence the ‘ecstatic jangle’ and ‘musical confusion’ (MND, IV.1.109) that echoed through the forest—turning down a redramatisation of the story for his nuptial evening’s entertainment:

‘The riot of the tipsy Bacchanals
Tearing the Thracian singer in their rage.’
That is an old device; and it was play’d
When I from Thebes came last a conqueror.

(Vi.48-51)

Suffering a fate akin to Pentheus, Ovid’s Orpheus meets his end against a similar acoustic backdrop, as the ‘sweete | And most melodious harmonye’ of ‘Orpheys harp’ is beset by barbaric ‘noyse … growing strong with blowing shalmes, and beating drummes, and bedlem howling out, | And clapping hands on every syde by Bacchus drunken rout’ (XI.11-12; 16-19). Ovid depicts the savage nature of the ‘flocke of Bacchic froes’ (22) by

28 Roth, p. 3.
contrasting their behaviour to the ‘savage beasts’ who now look on as the violence ensues, and by degrading the women themselves to ‘witesse beastes’ (44):

They flockt about him like as when a sort of birds have found
An Æwle a daytymes in a tod: and hem him in full round,
As when a Stag by hungrye hownds is in a morning found,
The which forestall him round about and pull him to the ground. (24-27)

What becomes increasingly clear in this text about transformation is the transfiguring effects of extasis—that ecstasy is a form of metamorphosis. It is this ecstatic frenzy that will bring about the metamorphoses of these Bacchanalian women. Discovering the extent to which his followers ‘wreake[d] theyr woodness’ (32), Bacchus grieves the ‘murther of the Chaplaine of his Orgies’ (77) and inflicts an apt punishment:

She sawe her leggs growe round in one, and turning into woode ...
Shee felt them [her thyghes] tree: her brest was tree: her shoulders eeke were tree. Her arms long boughs yee might have thought, and not deceyved bee. (91-5)

While we see throughout the Metamorphoses a number of figures transformed into trees, this metamorphosis, one that sees Bacchus ‘envrond … about’ by ‘woodwards and … franticke froes’ (99), seems particularly apt.29 As Richard Verstegran notes in his Restitution of Decayed Intelligence (1605), ‘wee yet retaine in some partes of England, the word for wodnes for furiousnes or madnes’; to be ‘wood’ is to be ‘out of ones mind, insane, lunatic’ (OED, adj. 1.a).30 Turned into trees for having too much endured a ‘dronken woodnesse wrought by wine’ (III.677), the metamorphosis of Bacchus’ worshippers literalizes Demetrius’ assertion in A Midsummer Night’s Dream: ‘I am … wood within this wood’ (II.i.92). Divine influence transforms these Bacchanals into ‘woodwards’: theirs is a

29 Elsewhere in the Metamorphoses, numerous other characters are transformed into trees as follows: Daphne (laurel tree); Phaethon’s sisters (amber trees); Baucis/Philemon (trees); Dryope (lotus tree); Cyparrissus (tree); Myrrha (tree); and, finally the Thracian women (trees).
‘dronken woodnesse’ that goes too far.

For the ecstatic worshipper of Bacchus, then, metamorphosis was more than a metaphorical concept: the divine influence of this ‘god of wine’ could truly transform a subject from ‘man to beast’. What are in the *Metamorphoses* merely metaphors ‘of shapes transformde into bodies strange’ (I.1) held, for these early ecstatic subjects, some element of truth. Tracing ecstasy from its Bacchic roots and through to the ‘Chaplaine of … Orgies’, Orpheus, this chapter reveals the ecstatic experience to be a kind of madness experienced by the subject in quest of divine union. Centred on the belief that man was part earth, part heaven, Orphics believed that leading a pure life enabled the heavenly part to develop. If successful, the Orphics believed, the soul could become one with Bacchus and experience the ecstasy of divine union. What are in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* metaphorical transformations were therefore for the Orphics necessary spiritual transformations, reincarnations of the soul, that proffered an ecstatic end: only once the soul has purified itself through a series of physical transformations—known as transmigrations—may it be united with the divine. To be under the influence, these early ecstatic subjects demonstrate, is a dangerous endeavour: by sending oneself out and allowing the divine to flow in, the subject risks losing themselves completely.
II. ‘THINGS EB AND FLOW’; OR, ‘THE LOVER’

Love is a true and sensible Transmigration of the Soul, or as some define it … It is an Extasie by which the Soul ceaseth to live in the Body, which she animates, to live in that which she Loves.\textsuperscript{31}

The ‘perpetuall revolution and transmigration of soules through bodies’, asserts John Donne in a sermon on 12 December 1626, ‘hath been the giddinesse of some Philosophers to think’.\textsuperscript{32} Describing the soul’s capacity to depart and enter bodies of its own accord, ‘transmigration’ or ‘metempsychosis’—which etymologically means to put the soul into (empsychoun) the beyond (meta)—exhibits a movement that is central to the ecstatic experience. The notion of being beside oneself as the soul departs the body was, therefore, by no means a new one for the Renaissance subject, but was indebted to classical thought, stemming from Pythagoras (c. 580 BCE) and Plato (c. 427-347 BCE). As Siobhán Collins notes in her close analysis of Donne’s satirical poem Metempsycosis (1601), ‘with the revival of Classical philosophy and literature the doctrine of metempsychosis was popularised in the Renaissance’.\textsuperscript{33} The poem—where the ‘loose soul’ (125) is ceaselessly ‘throwne’ into one body and ‘throwne out again’ (301-2)—coopts this sense of transference in order to capture some of the kinetic potential of New Scientific thought. For clergymen and author Francis Meres, writing in 1598, poetic influence might itself be articulated in these transmigratory terms: ‘As the soule of Auphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras: so the sweete wittie soule of Ovid lives in mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare’.

\textsuperscript{32} John Donne, \textit{LXXX Sermons Preached by that Learned and Reverend Divine, John Donne, Dr in Divinity} (London: by Miles Flesher, 1640), p. 816.
\textsuperscript{33} Siobhán Collins, \textit{Bodies, Politics and Transformations: John Donne’s Metempsychosis} (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p. 60.
\textsuperscript{34} Francis Meres, \textit{Palladis Tamia} (London: by P. Short, 1598), p. 281. Richard Bellings makes a contrary assertion in his note ‘To the Reader[s]’ of his sequal to Philip Sidney’s \textit{Arcadia}: ‘No no,
All things doo chaunge. But nothing sure dooth perish. This same spright
Doth fleete, and frisking heere and there dooth swiftly take his flight
From one place too another place, and entreth every wyght,
Removing out of man too beast, and out of beast too man.
But yit it never perrisheth nor never perrish can.

(Metamorphoses, XV.183-7)

By Book XV of this narratologically mutative narrative—where one story transforms and
bleeds into the next, as one figure picks up the concerns and symbolic resonances of their
predecessors—the reader is accustomed to the unstable propensity of all Ovidian matter
to mutate. ‘Removing out of man to beast’, the soul exists in a state of perpetual motion,
ceaselessly moving and re-moving itself from one body to another. As the soul migrates
from body to body, it sets upon a pathway toward the All which was, for the Pythagoreans,
a pre-requisite for union with the divine. In this model, the soul wanders between bodies
as though on an aspirational ladder, oriented towards an immanent understanding of
and attainment with the All. Not quite at home in the body, the soul aspires to stand
outside.

While these ideas were in circulation and captured the early modern imagination,
many early modern detractors ridiculed any real belief in the literal transmigration of
souls. As English clergyman John Brinsley (1600-1665) writes, ‘[Thomas] Aquinas … tells
us of certain Hereticks’ who dream ‘of a Pythagorical Metempsychosis, a transmigration, a
flitting of Souls out of one body into another’.35 Dressed as a priest, Feste interrogates
the ‘mad’ Malvolio on these matters in Twelfth Night:

| FESTE | What is the opinion of Pythagoras concerning wild-fowl? |
| MALVOLIO | That the soul of our grandam might happily inhabit a bird. |
| FESTE | What think’st thou of his opinion? |
| MALVOLIO | I think nobly of the soul, and no way approve his opinion. |
| FESTE | Fare thee well. Remain thou still in darkness. Thou shalt hold theopinion of Pythagoras ere I will allow of thy wits, and fear to kill a woodcock lest thou dispossess the soul of thy grandam. Fare |

I doe not follow Pythagoras his opinion of transmigrations: I am well assur’d divine Sidney’s soule is not infus’d into me’—A Sixth Booke to the Countess of Pembrokes Arcadia (Dublin: by the Societie of Stationers, 1624), sig. A3v.

At issue here are notions that the soul precedes the existence of the body; belief that ‘the soul of our grandam might happily inhabit a bird’ not only undermines man’s privileged position, but also threatens the key Christian concepts of sin and divine retribution.36 ‘In a Christian climate’ (R2, IV.i.131), the soul was believed to be created ex nihilo, not continually reborn. And so when Gratiano uses this narrative to articulate Shylock’s ‘currish spirit’ in The Merchant of Venice, he necessarily acknowledges its heretical potential:

O, be thou damned, inexorable dog,
And for thy life let justice be accused!
Thou almost mak’st me waver in my faith
To hold opinion with Pythagoras,
That souls of animals infuse themselves
Into the trunks of men. Thy currish spirit
Governed a wolf who, hanged for human slaughter,
Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet,
And whilst thou layest in thy unhallowed dam
Infused itself in thee; for thy desires
Are wolish, bloody, starved, and ravenous.

To ‘hold opinion with Pythagoras’, therefore, provokes a ‘waver[ing of] faith’, for while ‘fifteenth-century intellectuals invited Pythagoras to the status of prophet of Christianity’—owing primarily to his ‘revelations about the immortality of the soul’ which ‘conferred on him the status of a pre-Christian Christian’—notions of the soul’s pre-existence situated Pythagorean thought in opposition to Christian teaching. As French historian Michel Baudier (1589-1645) asserts—noting in a prefatory letter how easily he might suggest the addressee to be ‘animated with the Souls of the greatest

Heroes’—‘the Principles of Christianity forbid me to believe a Pythagorean Metempsychosis’.37

‘These fictions’, writes Michel Jeanneret,

feed the worst superstitions and are in patent contradiction with the lessons of the bible. … How can a species that God distinguishes once and for all transform into another? Such metamorphoses are scandalous because they upset the order of creation.38

‘Scandalous’ as they were, ‘these fictions’ of metamorphosis and metempsychosis held significant appeal for a number of early modern writers. For what they offer are narratives of transformation and change: models which suggest that the self might be best understood as being, like the soul, in continual progress; death in this model is not an end, but could instead be read in terms of movement and transformation. Indeed, Florentine philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), a key figure in bringing the ideas of both Plato and Pythagoras into circulation in the Renaissance, read Pythagoras’ notion of metempsychosis in precisely these terms: ‘the hidden truth to be drawn out by the exegete is the marvellous capacity of the soul to effect change in itself, to re-form itself’.39

Key to the soul’s metempsychotic departure from the body is this sense of change and transformation, and to think about the relationship between soul and body in this way provided a model for thinking about the inherent changeability of self.

Yet with each temporary severance of the tether between body and soul, with each reincarnation, the soul risks losing its way and falling into forgetfulness: a facet of the divine All is disclosed only to be forgotten. As James Luchte observes, ‘the silent aspiration of a return to the divine remains harbouredin the heart which sets above the

It is this forgetfulness that informs what Juliet Dusinberre considers to be ‘one of Rosalind’s most obscure jokes’ in *As You Like It*, as Rosalind happens upon Orlando’s romantic verse in the forest of Arden: ‘I was never so berhymed since Pythagoras’ time that I was an Irish rat, which I can hardly remember’ (III.ii.172-3). The joke, however, would likely have been less obscure for an early modern audience, for whom, as Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier notes, ‘familiarity with Pythagoras was so widespread … that authors … could even make light-hearted fun of him’, but that ‘occasions for this were … restricted to the subject of transmigration’. In these circumstances, Rosalind’s ‘obscure joke’ rests upon the same tenants as Donne’s *Poema Satyricon*, which recalls not only the doctrine of transmigration but furthermore that Pythagoras himself is said to have been able to recount his previous lives: ‘[he] himselfe said, that he remembered to have been *Aethaledes* then *Euphorbus*, afterward *Hermotimus*, at last from *Pyrrhus* to have passed into *Pythagoras*: having memorie of himselfe the space of two hundred and six yeares’. Echoing the contemporary belief that Irish rats could be rhymed to death, Rosalind seemingly remembers not only a past life, but also the violent acoustic backdrop of ‘drumming tunes’, as Jonson has it elsewhere, that accompanied and brought about death. Though Rosalind can ‘hardly remember’, she has not forgotten altogether: to transmigrate is not necessarily to forget.

In Donne’s variation on this Pythagorean doctrine, the soul similarly ‘can remember’ its accumulative experiences: ‘however the bodies have dul’d her other

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42 Joost-Gaugier, p. 59.
44 ‘Rime *[t]*hem to death, as they doe Irish rats, | In drumming tunes’, writes Ben Jonson—‘To The Reader’, in *Poétaster* (London: by William Stanley, 1616), p. 132. ‘I will not wish unto you’, writes Philip Sidney, ‘… to be rimed to death, as is said to be done in Ireland’—*The Defence of Poesie* (London: by Thomas Creede, 1595), sig. K2r.
faculties her memorie hath ever bene her owne’. For grounding the soul’s capacity to remember in the poem’s ‘Epistle’, Donne sets up his poem not as a series of discontinuous narratives, but as a model of narrative continuity: one of memory and nostalgia, of outgoing and homecoming, of ebb and flow. It is this emphasis on fluidity, as opposed to fixity and closure, that captured the Renaissance mindset. Able to ‘infuse’ itself into bodies, the fluid, metempsychotic soul permeates its hosts in much the same way that spirits influenced and inspired the Bacchanals. These liquid properties of the soul remained, for a number of early modern writers, key features of the ecstatic condition, where ‘soule into the soule may flow’, as Donne has it in ‘The Extasie’, and where the self might, in John Milton’s terms, ‘dissolve … into extasies’. In ecstasy, as in metempsychosis, the soul’s fluidity reflects the changeable nature of self: ‘in all the world there is not that that standeth and stay’, asserts Ovid’s Pythagoras. Central to our understanding of the ecstatic experience, then, is this sense that ‘things eb and flow’ (Metamorphoses, XV.189-9). Liquid, fluid, permeable, dissolvable: these properties define the ecstatic subject.

These notions of transmigration and the immortality of the soul were carried through to a number of Platonic dialogues. ‘That Plato tells of the transits of souls into beasts is Pythagorean’, asserts Ficino, whose Latin translation of a number of Plato’s works ensured that, as Sarah Hutton observes, ‘the philosophy of Plato was more widely known in the Renaissance than at any time since classical antiquity’. Indeed, for Ficino,
stressing the Pythagorean origins of certain Platonic thought served to protect Plato in moments where his doctrine, especially with regards to metempsychosis, lay contrary to Christian thought—thought which Ficino, along with the Florentine academy, sought to harmonise with Platonic philosophy.\textsuperscript{49} While tweaking elements of the narrative accordingly, Ficino nonetheless demonstrates Plato’s emphasis on an immortal soul that is fluid and mobile, driven by a desire to ascend to the divine. Central to these narratives is a trajectory of heavenly ascent, and thus notions of outgoing and homecoming remain:

‘Plato willed his soule to returne home to her kindred’, writes theologian Thomas Hayne, ‘and to her first originall, that is, saith he, to the wise and immortall godhead the fountaine of all goodnesse, as called from banishment into our owne native countrey’.\textsuperscript{50} As philosopher Jean Guillemard notes, encouraging his reader not to fear death, but, following Plato, to recognise instead that the body itself is a ‘sepulchre’: ‘the soule is a plant transported from heaven into a strange soyle, into the body of earth, where it sighs, pines away, and desires to depart’.\textsuperscript{51} The soul, in short, is never at home in the body.

‘The very nerves and sinews of Religion is hope of immortality’, asserts Neoplatonist Henry More—whose work often seeks to bring classical thought into dialogue with Renaissance religious belief—in a prefatory note to his Psychodia Platonica; \textit{Or, A Platonick Song of the Soul}.\textsuperscript{52} ‘Sing[ing]’ of ‘the immortalitie | of Souls’, More’s poem explores the central tenants of ‘Plato’s philosophie’, setting about the task of proving ‘that

\textsuperscript{49} As Celenza notes, ‘Ficino saves Plato from the charge of metempsychosis in a number of ways: he argues for a change in Plato’s opinions as he got older; and where certain things simply cannot be explained away, he allegorizes or blames Pythagoras’, p. 691.

\textsuperscript{50} Thomas Hayne, \textit{The Time, Places, and Persons of the Holie Scripture} (London: by Thomas Purfoot, 1607), p. 61


\textsuperscript{52} Henry More, \textit{Psychodia Platonica; Or, a Platonick Song of the Soul} (Cambridge: by Roger Daniel, 1642), sig. E3’.
when the soul by death’s cut off from all, | Yet she within her self might live and move’;
it is, he notes, ‘the purer flame of [divine] love [that] unties’ the ‘chains’ which bind the
soul to the body: once ‘unbound’ the soul ‘sores aloft’. But Plato also identifies instances
where the soul departs the body not just at the moment of death—‘when she this life hath
lost … she doth ascend … lifted aloft, not again to descend’, as More puts it—but also in
life:

Few men but will confesse that prophesie
Proceeds from God, when as our soul’s possest
By his all-seeing spright; als ecstasie
Wherein the soul snatch’d by the Deity,
And for a time into high heaven hent
Doth contemplate that blest Divinity.

It was possible, in other words, for the soul to be temporarily ‘wrapt into highest heavens’:
in these moments, ‘our soul hangs twixt’ God and the ‘world we know’, and goes ‘where
either spright doth snatch her’. ‘Soul and body severing’ (II.16) was not just
something that occurred at the moment of death, but was a kind temporary departure
that could be enjoyed by those ‘loose of soul’ (Oth., III.iii.418):

Though the union between the Body and the Soul be so strict … it is not so strong
but that sometimes it admits of a dissolution, which the Philosophers conceiv’d
possible, both the parts continuing entire. This separation is call’d an Ecstasy,
wherein the Platonists, who first brought it into Vogue, plac’d the Summun Bonum, or
greatest Felicity, inasmuch as they pretended, that mens minds were thereby
disengag’d from all material things.

Figured as a temporary ‘separation’ or ‘dissolution’ of the union between body and soul,
ecstasy, brought ‘into Vogue’ by the Platonists, here offers a ‘disengag[ment] from all
material things’, one that could yield ‘the Summun Bonum’, the greatest happiness. Where
Bacchic ecstasy was violent, Platonic ecstasy is joyously blissful. As stated at the outset of

53 More, p. 1; 22; 1.
54 More, p. 68; 24.
55 More, p. 79
56 Bureau d’Adresse et de Rencontre, Another Collection of Philosophical Conferences of the French Virtuosi
this thesis, ecstasy can cut both ways.

Replied to a letter from theologian Maarten van Dorp, Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus reiterates his argument in the final pages of his *Praise of Folly* (1511):

In showing a folly which is wise, I also showed an insanity which is sane and a madness which retains its senses. To soften what follows about the hapinnes of the blessed, I first cited the three forms of madness prescribed by Plato, where the happiest is that of lovers, for it takes them out of themselves. In the case of the pious, this ecstasy is only a foretaste of the happiness to come, in which we shall be wholly absorbed into God and be more in him than in ourselves. Now Plato calls it a madness when anyone is carried out of himself and exists in the object of his love where he finds his happiness.57

In a text that describes the importance and utility of such ‘folly’, Erasmus here sketches out what M. A. Screech has termed Plato’s ‘soul-departing philosophy’: the motion, in Erasmus’ terms, of being ‘carried out’ of oneself.58 Here, ‘the lover’ shares something with ‘the lunatic’: both have souls that strive to leave their bodies and, as a result, both are ‘mad’. But, according to Plato, there are different kinds of madness. As Socrates teaches in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, there are four kinds of divine ‘mania’: prophesy, revelation, poetic inspiration, and, most privileged of all, the ‘madness’ of mutual love.59 Each experience is characterized by ecstasy as we have understood it thus far: a moment where the soul is temporarily absent from the body, where the mind is thrown from its normal state, and where the spirit of the divine, or soul of the beloved, enters the body. To be ‘beside oneself’ in this way is to experience a privileged kind of frenzy, one that offers a glimpse at the divine, even if only temporarily. ‘The ecstasy of godly men, which Plato calls a holy madness’, Erasmus reiterates in another letter on 7 May 1518, ‘is a kind of

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foretaste of future blessedness, by which we shall be absorbed into God and live in future
more in him than in ourselves'. In the ecstasy and madness of love, we catch a fleeting
glimpse at that which lies beyond. As Socrates asserts, ‘the greatest goods come to us
through madness, provided that it is bestowed by divine gift’: ‘god-sent madness is a finer
thing than man-made sanity’ (Phaedrus, 244-45). In these frenzied wanderings, the soul
frees itself from the earthly prison which prevents its return to its heavenly home. As
Montaigne observes:

Plato disputeth thus; that the facultie of prophesiying and divination is far above-us, and that when wee treate it, we must be besides our selves: our wisdome must be darkened and over shadowed by sleepe, by sickenesse, or by drowzinesse; or by some celestiall fury, ravished from hir owne seat.

For the notoriously errant and wandering philosophe, an ecstatic subject is one whose
soul is bound to the body less tightly.

At the centre of these Pythagorean and Platonic narratives, then, is a mobile,
immortal soul which has the capacity to flow beyond its bodily borders. Love—an
experience which is, as we have heard, itself ‘merely a [kind of] madness’ (AYLI, III.ii.384)—motivates this movement, one of ‘ebb and flow’ (LLL, IV.iii.207) as the soul is temporarily called out towards the beloved and returns to the body, or, in the broader narrative, tethered to an earthly body and aspiring to return to the divine home from whence it fell: ‘as it is with the sea and the thames, there is ebbing and flowing’, writes
Puritan theologian Thomas Hooker, it is ‘the power of his Spirit … that makes the soule flowe … so it now flowes and comes to God again’. Drawn out beyond its confines, and allowing the other to flow within, an ecstatic subject distinguishes itself from those who are ‘hard-hearted’ (MND, II.i.195); those who, in the words of Saint Francis de Sales

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61 Montaigne, Essays, II.ii.192.
(1567-1622), ‘doe not easily receive the divine impressions’.63 ‘Contrariwise’, those who are open to ecstasy possess ‘a suple, pliable … and liquifying heart’ which, in turn, ‘liquifie[s] and melt[s] the Spouse his soule’:

She [the soul] is melted with love … going out of herself, and passing the limits of her naturall beeing … She permits herself to slide and runne into the thing beloved … lets her selfe gently glide, as a liquide and fluent thing, into the Divinite which she loves … So the soule which, though otherwise in love, remained before in her selfe, goes out by this sacred liquification, and saintly flowing, and foresakes her selfe, not onely to be united to the well-beloved, but to be entirely mingled and moistened with him.64

Ecstasy is here presented as a fluid movement: one of ‘going out’ and ‘runn[ing] into the … beloved’, of ‘go[ing] out’ in order ‘to be entirely mingled’. Such ‘liquefaction of a soule into her God’, de Sales continues, ‘is a true extasie’, an experience through which the soule ‘transcends’ her limits in order to attain ‘these holy excesses of heavenly love’.65

But it is also necessary to acknowledge the dangerous inverse of a claim like French lawyer and bishop Guillaume Du Vair’s that ‘the springhead of all goodness which is the love of God, floweth over soules, and spreadeth it selfe throughout all parts of their bodies’.66 For while these subjects might be persuaded to willingly announce themselves to ‘hense forth be fully molton: and relent in to the flowe of thy love’, French physician Jacques Ferrand appropriates this Platonic model in order to assert that ‘love is a kind of poison … which flows and glides into our bowels’, where ‘the animal spirits radiate from the lover towards the beloved’ and spread ‘throughout the body’, ‘thereby bringing on this disease’.67 In these circumstances, and as we will see in the subsequent chapters of this thesis, the early modern subject might think twice before opening themselves up to such affective experience, to having one’s ‘soul so enfettered’ (Oth., II.iii) to the beloved.

64 de Sales, p. 368.
65 Ibid.
After all, as we have heard, ecstasy is only a temporary experience—‘only a foretaste of happiness to come’ as Erasmus explained—and thus any celebration of fluency is to be followed by the inevitable ebb of this ‘liquide and fluent thing’: ‘hence it happens’, de Sales concludes, ‘that such as attaine to these holy excesses of heavenly love, afterward being come to themselves, can find nothing in the earth that can content them, and living in extreame annihilation of themselves remaine much weakned’. While ‘the very ecstasy of love’ (Ham., II.i.102) might well allow the soule to ‘go… out by this sacred liquefaction, and saintly flowing’, to give oneself over to the ‘ebb’ and flow of such an experience is to risk being carried along ‘like to a vagabond flag upon the stream’ which ‘goes to, and back’, and ‘rot[s] itself with [that] motion’ (Ant., Liv.42-6). Like ‘the lunatic’ whose enthusiasm blurred the distinction between divine union and intoxicated violence, the lover—who, as Theseus reminds us, is ‘just as frantic’—discovers that ecstasy can be agonising.

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68 de Sales, p. 368.
III. ALLOWING THE INFLUENCE; OR, ‘THE POET’

‘To say it was “electrifying” does not capture the effect’, writes American Journalist Ron Rosenbaum recalling Peter Brook’s 1970 production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: ‘It was more like being struck by lightning. I felt “transported” in the literal sense of being physically as well as metaphysically lifted from the muddy vesture of earth to some higher realm’.69 Something about Brook’s production moved—‘struck … transported … lifted’—Rosenbaum, and for critics such as G. K. Chesterton, ‘in pure poetry and the intoxication of words, Shakespeare never rose higher than he rises in [*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*]’.70 By these accounts, Shakespeare’s poetry has the potential to both move and intoxicate us: to watch or read the play might be to find oneself, in some crucial sense, under its influence. Indeed, Rosenbaum’s description of feeling as though he was ‘struck by lightning’ finds its classical correlative in Cassius Longinus’ account of the ecstasy of the sublime—the greatness of thought and intensity of feeling, brought about by the affective experience of reading and listening—the effects of which he variously likens to a ‘flash of lightning’ or the sudden impact of a ‘thunderbolt’:

The effect of genius is not to persuade the audience but rather to transport them out of themselves. Invariably, what inspires wonder, with its power of amazing us, always prevails over what is merely convincing and pleasing. For our persuasions are usually under our own control, while these things exercise an irresistible power and mastery, and get the better of every listener.71

In terms that have punctuated this classical pre-history of ecstasy, Greek scholar and statesman Longinus asserts that great writing ‘inspires wonder’ and ‘transport[s]’ listeners ‘out of themselves’. Furthermore, it is an experience that again denotes movement: both

upwards towards the divine—as the title of Longinus’ treatise *Peri hypsous* (*peri*: on, about; *hypo*: height, aloft) or *On the Sublime* suggests—but also outwards towards an audience, who are in turn thrown beside themselves in sublime rapture. As poet George Wither describes in his fourth eclogue:

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The kinde flames of Poesy
Have now borne thy thoughts so high,
That they up in Heaven be
And have quite forgotten mee.72
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The power of poetry, often described in Wither’s works, is such that it carries us away: ‘A fit, that some will call poetick-madness, | Hath now surprized me’, writes Wither elsewhere in the opening to his *Furor-Poeticus*.73 In these circumstances, we see how comfortably the ‘poet’ sits in the company of the ‘lunatic’ and the ‘lover’. What makes these ecstatic subjects ‘all compact’, as Theseus had it, is their enthusiastic fluidity: their capacity to move and be moved.

Indeed, as we have seen, Plato placed such ‘poetic inspiration’ alongside the madness of mutual love as a kind of divine ‘mania’ or ‘furor’. As Ficino considers in a published letter from 4 March 1474:

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Plato was right in his view that poetry springs not from technique but from a kind of frenzy. … In Phaedrus and Ion, he discusses divine frenzy, of which he claims there are three principle signs. Firstly, without God, one can scarcely master a single art, even after a long time. Secondly, those who are in a frenzy may utter many wonderful things [as] … God had sounded in through them, as though through trumpets. Thirdly, neither prudent men nor those learned from their youth have proved to be the best poets. … Plato adds that some very unskilled men are thus possessed by Muses, because divine providence wants to show mankind that the great poems are not the invention of men but gifts from Heaven. He indicates this in Phaedrus when he says that no one, however diligent and learned in all the arts, has ever excelled in poetry unless to these other qualities he has been added a fiery quickness of the soul. We experience this when we are inflamed by God’s presence working in us. Such force carries the seed of the divine mind.74
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Good poetry is here not simply a work of art, but comes of being inspired or possessed, of having ‘a fiery quickness of the soul’. Once again, ‘divine frenzy’ is articulated in terms of the soul’s movement, and the ability for the divine to inspire and flow through the subject, ‘as though through trumpets’. This movement is crucial, for if a speaker is truly moved, they can move others in turn; as French poet and priest Pontus de Tyard notes, following Ficino, ‘the divine furor not only makes a good poet, but also drenches with its liquor … those who listen to these verses’. Ecstasy, therefore, could be a highly affective experience. This potential of words to ‘move’ the soul, Katherine Craik has observed, signalled both a ‘writer’s superlative achievement’ and ‘the matching commitment of the reader’ who was enthralled and elevated by these sublimely affecting passages: ‘uplifted with a sense of proud exaltation, we are filled with joy and pride, as if we had ourselves produced the very thing we heard’. In this affective model, authors were inspired, and audiences were enthusiastically involved: poetic excellence is both a product of and a catalyst for ecstatic rapture, as one soul moved out of place moved others in turn.

But what we might now celebrate, like Rosenbaum, as the capacity for a production or speech to ‘move’ us, was, for the early modern anti-theatricalist, also a cause for concern. As Bridget Escolme has shown, the sense of ‘motion’ in ‘emotion’ would not only have been familiar to an early modern audience, but was also understood quite literally. ‘Emotion’, Escolme notes, involves this sense of ‘somatic turbulence and movement’, with many ‘early modern treatises on the passions figur[ing] them as turbulent movements it is impossible to control’. Such movements were consistently understood as ‘motions of the soule’: as, in Thomas Wright’s terms, ‘certain internall actes or operations of the soule bordering upon reason and sense, prosecuting some good

77 Escolme, xxii.
thing, or flying some ill thing, causing therewithal some alteration in the body’. A claim such as ‘my lord, I see you are moved’ (Oth., III.iii.226) is therefore, as we shall see in Chapter Four, one laden with dangerous potential: one that could have profound physical and psychological consequences. ‘Comedies so tickle our senses with a pleasenter vein’, asserts anti-theatricalist Stephen Gosson, ‘that they make us lovers of laughter and pleasure without any mean, both foes of temperance; what schooling is this?’ Pollard describes how ‘Gosson worrie[d] particularly that plays’ powerful effects on the senses gave them a dangerous power to invade audiences’ hearts, minds, and souls’. In these circumstances, one could be ‘moved’ to laugh, cry, or, as Thomas Heywood describes in his Apology for Actors (1616), compelled to confess to their crimes. Theatregoing, in other words, was understood as having the potential to bring about dangerous transformations, and in his Th’overthrow of Stage-Playes, John Rainolds—a reader in Greek at Corpus Christi in Oxford—shows just how dangerous these transformations could be, citing an event ‘recorded [by Lucian] to have come to pass in the Cite of Abdêra’:

At misdummer, in very hott weather, Andromeda (a Tragedie of Euripedes) being played, manic [audience members] brought home a burning ague from the theater: about the seventh day following, they were riddle thereof, some by much bleeding, some by sweating, but all, as soon as they were abroad their beddes, did fall into a strange distemper and passion of a light phrensie. The which exciting

81 In his Apology for Actors, Thomas Heywood cites a story he asserts to be ‘true, as well by the report of the Actors as the records of the Towne’: ‘As this was acted, a townes-woman (till then of good estimation and report) finding her conscience (at this presentment) extremely troubled, suddenly skritchted and cryd out Oh my husband, my husband! I see the ghost of my husband fiercely threatening and menacing me. At which shrill and uexpected out-cry, the people about her, moov’d to a strange amazement, inquired the reason of her clamour, when presently unurged, she told them, that seven yeares ago, she, to be possest of such a Gentleman (meaning him) had poysoned her husband, whose fearfull image personated it selfe in the shape of that ghost: whereupon the murdresse was apprehended, before the Iustices further examined, & by her voluntary confession after condemned. That this is true … there are many eye-witnesses of this accident yet living, vocally to confirme it.’ (London: by Nicholas Okes, 1612), sig. G1'-G2'.

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them to say & cry aloude such things as were sticking freshly in their memorie, and had affected most their minde.\footnote{52}

That these Thracian theatregoers could be thrown into such ‘franticke follie’ functions, for Rainolds, as support for his claim that ‘the seeing wherof played but an hower, or two, might taint spectators’: that drama could transform playgoers completely.\footnote{83} ‘Bleeding’, ‘sweating’, falling into ‘strange distemper’ and ‘light phrensic’, these subjects are not only ‘moved’ by what they see and hear, but are violently and physically affected. Indeed, as plague caused London’s theatres to close, these fears were not too distant.\footnote{84}

Observing the subject moved out of and beside itself, this chapter has demonstrated the extent to which, for the early modern subject, ecstasy, like the sublime, could be an affectively e-motional experience: one that moved the soul, one capable of altering the body, one that could move others in turn. As we have seen, ecstasy holds this dangerous potential. But, as Allison Hobgood demonstrates, these affective encounters also provided a catalyst for ‘precariously pleasurable transformations in theatregoers’ whose identification with ‘characters on stage brought about a temporary realignment of their ego boundaries, and their familiar selves disappeared in a pleasurable diffusion of subjectivity’.\footnote{85} In these terms, as Jean Starobinski asserts in his study of Montaigne, relation to others ‘is no longer a peril, a loss of oneself, a superfluity, but an obligatory passage without which identity can never be sure of itself’.\footnote{86} The individual who is open to ecstatically affective encounter—to the influence of the divine, the beloved, or swept

\footnotetext[52]{52}John Rainolds, \textit{Th'overthrow of Stage-playes} (Middleburg: by Richard Schilders, 1599), p. 118.
\footnotetext[83]{Rainolds, p. 119. Allison Hobgood persuasively considers how playgoers could also have reciprocally transformed drama in \textit{Passionate Playgoing in Early Modern England} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

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along by narrative pleasure—demonstrates the capacity for such an experience to both inform and transform. What this prehistory of the ecstatic experience reveals is that, for the early modern subject, there is something beyond the confines of the self—union with the divine, the attainment of knowledge, a prospect of a greater sense of connection to others and the world around you—that makes taking a step outside an enticing prospect. At the heart of this study, as indeed at the heart of early modern conceptions of ecstatic experience, lies an acknowledgement that ecstasy is at once both a risk and an opportunity.

For the subjects of this chapter and those that follow, the ecstatic experience is one that brings about an awareness of the boundaries that constitute the self. While we must necessarily acknowledge the dangers of ‘open[ing] the door’ (Err., III.i.38), the ecstatic subjects of this study will encourage that we not ‘keep the gate’ and ‘let no creature enter’ (II.ii.206-10), but that we allow ourselves to venture outside the confines of the ‘city … state, [or] self’. This thesis, in other words, celebrates the risk that ecstasy demands of its subjects; while we necessarily recognise the dangers of ecstasy as we progress through this study, we also recognise that getting ‘carried away’ might not be such a bad thing. Ficino may well be right that ‘bodies are most eagerly attached to their souls, and are separated from them with the greatest reluctance’ but, as Michel Serres has it, ‘no one who has not experienced ecstasy can know what being together means’.87

87 Serres, The Five Senses, p. 324.
CHAPTER TWO

Outgoing, Homecoming:
Early Modern Narratives of Religious Ecstasy

Paul, thou art besyde thyself.¹

It is one thing, from the wilde top of a Mountaine to see the Land of Peace, and not to find the way thither; and in vaine to travell through wayes unpassable, round about beset with these fugitive Spirits, forsakers of their God, lying in ambush with that Ring-leader of theirs … and another thing to keep on the way that leads thither, which is guarded by the care of our heavenly Generall.²

Informed by the Platonic model outlined in the previous chapter, St. Augustine figures the soul’s return to God as a journey upwards. While some have failed ‘to find their way thither’ up the mountain, others manage to ‘keep on the way’ home toward ‘the Land of Peace’. Augustine’s Confessions are, from the very outset, driven by this compulsion to go beyond—‘thou hast made us for thy self and our hearts are restless till they rest in thee’ (I.i.2)—and as a result, as Andrew Louth notes, ‘the sense of not being at home in the world is fundamental to Augustine’s mystical thought’.³ This restless sense of not feeling at home is one shared by each of the travelling subjects of this chapter, for whom ‘to lie | In restless ecstasy’ (Mac., III.i.23-24) is to find oneself relentlessly caught between and motivated by the experiences of outgoing and homecoming; of throwing oneself beside oneself in order to return to what Platonists considered the home of bliss from whence the soul once fell. But here, in Augustine’s narrative of religious travails and later in

¹ The Holie Bible, trans. Matthew Parker (London: by Richard Jugge, 1568), lxxxvii. Replacing the Calvinist Geneva Bible, the Bishop’s Bible is generally acknowledged as the Bible with which Shakespeare was most familiar. As Rudolph Chris Hassel Jr. notes, ‘Shakespeare (or his characters) … cites the Bible so precisely that scholars have shown him alternating between the Bishops’ and the Genevan versions’—Shakespeare’s Religious Language: A Dictionary (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015), p. xx.
² Saint Augustine, Saint Augustine’s Confessions, trans. William Watts (London: by John Norton, 1631), VII.xxi.27. Subsequent parenthetical references are to this edition unless otherwise stated. I refer to Augustine’s works by book, chapter, and page numbers.
Renaissance religious writing, we also encounter subjects who are made restless by ecstasy: subjects who, familiar with the narratives of religious ecstasy set forth and cultivated by key figures such as Plato, St. Paul, St. Augustine, and St. Teresa, find themselves restlessly longing to situate themselves within those ecstatic narratives, looking to these ecstatic frameworks to provide structure for otherwise inchoate experience. The following discussion considers what is at stake in that endeavour, outlining the established model of religious ecstasy to which the devout early modern subject might aspire, before then bringing into focus the implications of this narrative for subjects who are not at home in themselves, and for whom residence with the divine is not guaranteed. Exploring these dynamics of faith and aspiration in the poetry of George Herbert, John Donne, and Richard Crawshaw, this chapter will then situate these narratives of ecstasis alongside Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in order to suggest the extent to which the playwright—whose work rarely engages directly or explicitly with religious texts—can be seen to inherit this language of ecstatic aspiration and vulnerability. In what ways, I will ask, is Shakespeare’s drama informed by narratives of religious ecstasy?

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4 It is not my intention in what follows to suggest the extent to which ecstasy could be classified as either a Catholic or Protestant experience. Indeed, many of the figures at the centre of this chapter cannot be classified so neatly, with poets such as John Donne and Richard Crawshaw converting between faiths (from Catholicism to Anglicanism and from Anglicanism to Catholicism respectively). Furthermore, St. Teresa’s experience was not authenticated by the Catholic Church until 1622. The extent to which ecstatic experiences complicate such clear-cut classification is neatly summarized by a debate played out in the marginalia of Teresa's autobiography *The Flaming Hart*: 'This Saint you see, was certainly no Protestant', reads a printed note, to which an anonymous seventeenth-century reader retorts: 'I say that she was a Protestant, tho [n]ominally Rom[an] Catholic'—Folger shelfmark: 157-787, cit. N. K. Sugimura, “Divine annihilations”: Richard Crawshaw’s Religious Politics and the Poetics of Ecstasy’, *Modern Philology*, 112 (2015), 615-642 (641). This was a hotly contested subject. This is not to ignore terminological complications endemic to religious history of the period, which variously labels subjects as Catholic, Protestant, Puritan, Anglican, Laudian, and so on. Rather, it is to bring into focus a vocabulary of ecstasy which is shared by a range of authors. Put simply, this chapter does not consider how far ecstasy belongs to a Catholic or Protestant lexicon, but rather identifies the ecstatic lexion that resists such neat categorisation.
I. ST. AUGUSTINE AND THE NARRATIVE OF ECSTATIC ASCENSION

‘Persistent toil overcomes all things’, writes Petrarch in a letter to Dionigi de Borgo San Sepolcro on 26 April 1336, detailing his recent ascent of Mont Ventoux. Here Petrarch describes wandering around the valleys, seeking alternative routes towards the summit to the short-cuts taken by his brother who accompanied him, but instead finding himself veering downwards and losing his way: ‘I hoped to find an easier passage on the other side of the mountain and that I would not be afraid of a longer road if I could advance more easily’ (174). But Petrarch’s journey is a difficult one, and his account is punctuated throughout with references to his ‘burden’, ‘weariness’, ‘distress’, ‘serious trouble’, and ‘delu[sion]’ (174). When he finally reaches the summit, he finds himself ‘moved by a certain unaccustomed quality of the air and by the unrestricted spectacle’, and stands quite still ‘as in a trance’, admiring the views and ‘thinking about earthly things’ before then ‘raising [his] mind to loftier things’ (175-6). It is at this moment that Petrarch turns to the book he has with him, a copy of Augustine’s Confessions; ‘I opened it and started to read at random’, he writes:

By chance it was the tenth book of that work to which I opened … [and] my eyes happened to light where it was written: ‘And they do to admire the summits of mountains and the vast billows of the sea and the broadest rivers and the expanses of the ocean and the revolutions of the stars and they overlook themselves’. I confess that I was astonished. I closed the book enraged with myself because I was even then admiring earthly things after having been long taught by pagan philosophers that I ought to consider nothing wonderful except the human mind compared to whose greatness nothing is great. … Then indeed having seen enough of the mountain I turned my inner eyes within, and from that moment there was no one who heard me speak until we arrived back at the foot of the mountain.

(178)

Similarly turning to the Confessions—a seminal text for figures such as Thomas Aquinas

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and John Donne, first translated into English by Tobie Matthew in 1620—the ensuing discussion will demonstrate the frequency with which these narratives of ascension so often find themselves in dialogue with one another. Allowing Petrarch and other Renaissance writers to remain in conversation with the fourth-century theologian’s journey towards spiritual ascent, this section establishes the rhetoric and narrative framework of religious ecstasy, as it will later appear in the work of Donne, Herbert, and Shakespeare. Here we see a model of the subject-in-pilgrimage, where the spatial dynamics of ecstatic faith are mapped onto a literal landscape.

i) AUGUSTINE, PLATO, AND THE DESIRE TO RETURN HOME

The Seventh Book of Augustine’s *Confessions* is, in many ways, an admission of a lack of knowledge about the true nature of God. He begins by articulating the internal struggle—‘My heart passionately cryed out upon all my former phantasmes; and with one blow I laid about mee, to beat away all that stuttering troope of uncleane fancies, from the eye of my mind’ (i.340)—which he faces as he becomes disillusioned with ‘those dumbe praters’ of Manicheism (ii.345), ‘the sort of esoteric Christianity that he had adopted in late adolescence’ but which he now comes to reject. Similarly ‘reject[ing] those deceitfull Divinations, and impious dotages of the Astrologers’ (vi.360), Augustine instead turns to ‘certaine Bookes of the Platonists’ (ix.375) in his quest to better understand the divine. While there is, as John Peter Keeley notes, ‘uncertainty regarding Augustine’s Platonic syllabus’, what Augustine does make clear is that these are works through which he becomes ‘more and more puffed up with … knowledge’ (xx.405), and that these books

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mark a crucial stage in the advancement of his philosophical reflections. Augustine, whose conception of faith is predicated upon the notion of journeying and return, therefore inherited two compatible traditions. For it is in being ‘perswaded’ and ‘admonished’ by these Platonic texts that Augustine begins to turn his attention inwards and ‘returne[s] to my selfe’ (375; 382):

I entred even into mine one inwards, thou being my leader. … Into my self I went, and with the eye of my soule (such as it was) I discovered over the same eye of my soule, over my minde, the unchangeable light of the Lord.

(x.381)

While this thesis has previously understood the ecstatic model as one which necessitates a journey out of the self, Augustine, informed by Platonic doctrine that stressed the immortal soul’s desire to return home to the divine All, makes it clear that the path upwards towards God first requires retraction and introspection. Just as Petrarch turned his ‘inner eyes within’, one must journey into and through oneself before being drawn upwards.

This notion of indwelling as a precondition for outgoing—of introspective ascent—is integral to Augustine’s contemplative vision, and this movement from outside, to inside and upwards, becomes his characteristic mode of religious travel and discovery. For such spiritual introspection brings into focus the extent to which the self is dependent on another source: ‘I am aware of my own sensing and thinking’ writes Charles Taylor in his articulation of Augustinian inwardness:

… and in reflecting on this, I am made aware of its dependence on something beyond it, something common. … I recognize that this activity which is mine is grounded on and presupposes something higher than I, something which I should look up to and revere. By going inward, I am drawn upward.

Or, to recall Augustine himself: ‘I entered into mine owne inwards … and with the eye

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7 Keeley, p. 15.
of my soule … I discovered … the unchangable light of the Lord’ (381). As much as ‘the Confessions is, in the end, about God and the soul’, as Keeley notes, it is also a journey towards self-discovery: what this Platonic narrative offers Augustine is a model through which he might better understand and define himself. But that is, in many ways, precisely the problem. While it is in turning inwards that Augustine catches a glimpse of divine light, one ‘superiour to my soule, because it made me’ (382), this glimpse as yet remains only temporary. ‘[T]hou liftest me up, that I might see there was something which I might see’, recounts Augustine, ‘and yet it was not what I did see’ (382); Augustine knows that there is something to be seen, yet divine (in)sight lies out of view. ‘I trembled both with love and horror: and I perceived my selfe to be far off from thee’: left without the union and clarification he seeks, Augustine instead comes to realise his ‘utter Unlikeness’ (382) to the divine. In a moment of ecstatic contemplation that promised ‘self-sameness’—‘the classical epithet for the Platonic forms’—Augustine rather finds himself cast back into radical unlikeness and instability, where God’s ultimate articulation of divine agency ‘I AM THAT I AM’ can be heard, but only ‘from afarre off’ (383). This is a text which tries continually to narrow gaps and spaces, to propel towards a teleological goal, but yet is beset by way-laying and unexpected distances which repeatedly prevent Augustine’s return home to God. Instead, Augustine remains in travel, at a spectator’s distance.

Augustine’s conception of the ecstatic experience is marked by its fleeting nature, one that is unable to last because the soul’s moral weakness precludes contact and therefore total union with the divine: ‘And now came I to have a sight of those invisible things of thee … But I was not able to fixe mine eye long upon them: … my infirmity being beaten backe againe’ (xvii.397). Such descriptions are not unique to the Confessions;

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9 Keeley, p. 77.
in *Sermon 52*, Augustine discusses the temporary nature of ecstasy in relation to Psalm 31:22 (‘I said in my ecstasy, I am cut off before your eyes’). Much like his account in Book VII, the narrative follows a ‘soul lifted up to God, [who] poured out his soul above [it]self … reach[ing] that unchangable light by a form of spiritual contact’. After ‘a while in ecstasy, having been separated from bodily experience and snatched up to God’, the soul returns to its corporeal, human condition: just as much as the soul is a gift, it is also a ‘burden’. But Augustine’s account of his experience in the *Confessions* is much more violent and painful: ‘thou diddest beat backe the infirmity of my owne sight’; ‘I was ravisht to thee by thine owne beauty; and yet by and by I violently fell off againe … the body which is corrupted, presseth down the soule … my infirmity being beaten backe againe’ (382; 394-397, emphasis added). With the knowledge that ‘by this very soule, I will ascend up unto him’ (588), comes the painful recognition that the soul, chained to and infected by its corporeal, earthly prison, is similarly disposed towards descent:

Subject to these ‘strange affects’, Augustine articulates himself as being in a state of constant motion. Indeed, infused with intense delight before being weighed back down, desiring to ascend yet habitually caught below, Augustine’s narratives of ascension are punctuated by this sense of suffering from which he is never quite freed. As Keely writes: ‘nothing is ever easy for the Augustinian soul’. Ecstasy can be agonising.

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10 Cit. Keeley, p. 135.
11 Ibid.
12 Due to an illegible manuscript, this citation is to Augustine’s *Confessions*, trans Sir Tobie Matthew (Saint-Omer: English College Press, 1620), X.XL.568-9.
13 Keeley, p. 71.
The optimism and spiritual confidence of Plato and Plotinus is therefore understandably absent in Augustine’s *Confessions*; while contemplative souls elsewhere find salvation, the moral weight of Augustine’s soul is always a hindrance to flight: ‘only an infirmity of the soule it is, that it … cannot entirely rise up together’ (464). Where the Platonist texts offered Augustine hope, then, they also presented a danger; ‘they describe a vain path to salvation, which can tempt the soul to spiritual pride, and thereby ironically and tragically exacerbate its fallen state’, notes Keeley.14 Aware that ‘I can find no safe place for my soul except in you’ (X.xi.65), Augustine is thrown into a world of radical instability, for while that ‘safe place’ is ever present, it is always just out of reach. ‘I set my self to seeke a meanes of recovering so much strength, as should bee sufficient to enjoy thee; but I could not finde it …’ (VII.xviii.398): it is claims such as this that lead a number of critics to read Book VII as ‘a series of attempts at Plotinian ecstasy’ or, more specifically, as Brian Dobell puts it, ‘failed attempts at ecstasy’.15 Similarly, for Susan M. Felch, Book VII offers a description of Augustine’s ‘younger self Platonically striving in solitude to scale the heights of divine knowledge. And failing’.16 Understood in these terms, Augustine fails to achieve in Book VII the ecstasy that he eventually experiences in Book X, following his conversion to Christianity. Before turning to Augustine’s famous Ostian narrative, however, I wish to consider the inverse of these claims: not that Augustine fails to achieve Platonic ecstasy, but rather that the narrative of Platonic ecstasy fails him.

Indeed, as the previous chapter highlighted, the ecstatic experience was for Plato

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14 Keeley, p. 71.
a requisite stage of enlightenment, whereby, according to Marsilio Ficino, ‘after the soul has fallen from higher things to lower, God draws it back from lower to higher’. Indeed, for Augustine, the spiritual element in man is a painful reminder not of the potential for salvation, but of his fallen state. As Keeley observes:

Unlike the compatibilism of divine production and fall in Plotinus, the creation and fall are distinct events for Augustine, the latter exacerbating the former. Hence these texts from Book VII exhibit a greater sense of loss, a greater need for salvific restitution, and a profound need for the soul to be submissive to God.

As Protestant divine William Watts’ translation and subheadings suggest—outlining an exploration ‘Of the divers Bookes of the Platonists’ followed by ‘What he found in the holy Scriptures, which was not in the Platonists’—the latter stages of Book VII exhibit not only Augustine’s struggle to achieve ecstasy, but rather suggest the extent to which the Platonic narrative of ecstatic union with the divine fails him. For him, the state is not sustainable and not available in the way he had come to expect. In his identification of the inadequacies of the Libri Platonici, Augustine therefore finds not salvation, but limitation:

There again did I read, that God the Word was not borne of flesh nor of blood, nor of the will of man, nor of the will of the flesh, but of God. But that the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, did I not there reade.

(376)

‘All this did I not read there’; ‘those Bookes have not’; ‘[it] is not there’; ‘none of all this doe these Platonic writings containe’; ‘No man in those Bookes heares him calling’ (376; 377; 378; 409; 410): these claims punctuate Augustine’s account of the Platonist books. While his contemplative experience makes him sure of God’s existence—‘O eternall Truth!’ (xx.382)—Augustine grows increasingly aware of his abject distance from the divine. Despite his assertion that he is ‘puffed up with knowledge’ through these Platonist works, that knowledge ultimately leads, as Dobell observes, ‘to “destruction” rather than

18 Keeley, p. 71.
to the blessed life’.  

This failure is significant for Augustine, for it is one that will lead him to redirect his focus to Scripture and set him upon a path that will eventually lead him to salvation: ‘upon these [books] I beleve it was, thy pleasure that I should first fall, before. I took thy Scriptures into my consideration’ (405). It is this fortunate ‘fall’ or felix culpa, Augustine asserts, that enables him to come to a more comprehensive understanding of his relationship with the divine. It is therefore crucial for him to remember ‘how far those [Platonic] Bookes wrought upon [his] affections’—for him to ‘print in memory’ the impression they made—in order for him to be ‘made tractable by thy [God’s] Bookes’ (405; 406); it is through encountering the shortcomings of Platonic doctrine that Augustine becomes tractable (OED, adj. 1.a: ‘docile, compliant, manageable’) to divine tract (OED, n. 2: ‘an anthem consisting of verses of Scripture’). Thus, at the close of Book VII, Augustine sets himself upon a different track altogether, adopting the narrative of pilgrimage and highlighting the vertical geography of ecstasy:

For it is one thing, from the wilde top of a Mountaine to see the Land of Peace, and not to find the way thither; and in vaine to travell through wayes unpassable … and another thing to keep on the way that leades thither, which is guarded by the care of our heavenly Generall.

(xxi.410)

While Platonism offered Augustine the capacity to ‘see the Land of Peace’—or, at least, a glimpse at what might have been seen—it did not show him the way. Instead, to appropriate from the speaker of Shakespeare’s ‘Sonnet 7’, Augustine’s ‘eyes … now converted are | from his low tract and [now he] look[s] another way’ (11-2), turning from Plato to St. Paul and so beginning his conversion to Christianity: ‘these things did by wonderfull meanes sinke into my very bowels, when as I read that least of thy Apostles, and had considered upon thy workes, and trembled (1 Cor, 15.9)’ (vii.410-11). Having

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19 Dobell, p. 209.
redirected his focus from secular to sacred reading, Augustine comes to ‘discerne at last and distinguish’ between ‘those who saw whither they were to goe, but knew nothing of the way’, and those that took ‘that path which leades unto that blessed Countrey, not to be lookt upon onely, but dwelt in’ (406). Access to the latter, he now recognizes, would not have been possible through ‘these Platonike bookees … onely’ (407). Here we find ecstasy appropriated into new hands.

ii) AUGUSTINE, DONNE, AND THE ATTRACTION OF TRACTABILITY

This rhetoric of the soul’s tractability and divine traction—of finding and keeping oneself on the path towards union with the divine—would continue to find articulation in discussions of the soul’s quest for union with God. ‘Watch the way of the Spirit of God, into thee’, advises Donne, who, as Katrin Ettenhuber has observed, turned to Augustine’s work ‘throughout his career with almost obsessive frequency’;\(^2\)

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\text{That way which he makes his path, in which he comes ofnest to thee, and by which thou findest thy self most affected, and best disposed towards him, and pervert not that path. … Make streight his paths, that is, keepe them streight; and when thou observest, which is his path in thee, (by what means especially he workes upon thee) meet him in that path, embrace him in those meanes, and alwayes bring a facile, a fusil, a ductile, a tractable soule, to the offers of his grace, in his way.} \]

Adopting Augustine’s travel dynamic, Donne asserts that the subject must ‘make streight his paths’ towards the divine because it is not only the route ‘best disposed towards him’, but also the way ‘in which [God] comes ofnest to thee’; the track is not just one-way but runs in both directions, allowing the subject to journey out towards the other in search of union. An exploration of these dynamics, therefore, suggests that ecstasy includes

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additional directions and movements. Again, in his sermon on Judges 5.20 (September 15, 1622), Donne advocates ‘a good, tractable, and ductile disposition’, promoting a soul that is disposed towards disposition, towards being drawn out—‘ductile, easy to be drawne’, as Thomas Elyot’s Dictionary has it. What these narratives of ‘ductile and tractable soules’ repeatedly drive towards is an ipseic flexibility and malleability, for this is, as Rector Peter Watkinson notes, ‘the Fire and Hammer, wherewith God breaks the Rocks (the stoniest hearts) in pieces’:

It makes the flintiest heart contrite and humble, and to tremble at the Hearing of it: whereby it becomes tractable, and ductile, apt to receive divine impressions. Hence the Apostle praiseth God, who had so moulded the Romans, that they were delivered into that form or type of Doctrine (for so it is in the Greek) they were cast into that mould, or received that stamp.

To be tractable and ductile is to be ‘apt to receive divine impressions’, because a ‘ductile disposition’ is one that allows the soul to be drawn out towards the divine and reformed. Echoing period coining metaphors that articulated the subject in terms of its wax-like impressionability, Donne here articulates the ductile subject as one that could be ‘moulded’ by being placed into a ‘form or type’, and there be ‘stamp[ed]’ by God. As Donne declares elsewhere in a sermon at the Earl of Exeter’s chapter at St. John’s, Clerkenwell, in 1624: ‘God sealed us, in imprinting his Image in our souls … every man hath this seal, and he hath it, as soone as he hath a soule’. Just as seal-impressions were used to authenticate documents, and coin-impressions validated the fineness and weight of a coins’ metal, so ‘divine impressions’ here authenticate the devout subject with the

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imprint of God’s image: religious identity could be stamped upon the subject. Only those with a ‘ductile disposition’ can be so impressionable, for good or ill. As Theseus warns Hermia in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, employing a commonplace metaphor of biological generation to impression, and simultaneously aligning a father-figure with ‘god’, the Father:

To you your father should be as a god,
One that composed your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax,
By him imprinted, and within his power
To leave the figure, or disfigure it.

(I.i.47-51)

To be ‘a form in wax’, ‘imprinted’ by the ‘father’, is to recognise the extent to which such impressions can both ‘compose’ and ‘disfigure’; allowing divine influence and impression, the pliable, ductile subject opens itself to an experience that can either ‘figure, or disfigure it’.

As we have seen, this is a narrative that Augustine, with his ‘infirmity being beaten back againe’, knew all too well. As a number of Renaissance texts make clear, such a beating is part of the process: a ‘ductile disposition’ is only available to the subject who can withstand the stroke of the hammer, the receipt of the stamp: ‘send a thunderbolt of grace from heaven’, pleads clerk Thomas Warmstry, ‘and dash my heart to pieces … that I may be undone in my self, so that I may be made up again in thee’. It is in this context that we hear Donne’s plea not only to ‘batter my heart’ but also to ‘knocke, breathe, shine, and seeke to mend’ as he calls to a ‘force’ that lies beyond to ‘o’erthrow me’ and ‘to breake, blowe, burn, and make me new’. As Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen has noted in his

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25 Kimberley Ann Coles notes that Donne employs this rhetoric of divine impression to articulate his changable faith: ‘You shall seldome see a Coyne, upon which the stamp were removed, though to imprint it better, but it looks awry and squint … And so, for the most part, do mindes which have received divers impressions’—‘The Matter of Belief in John Donne’s Holy Sonnets’, *RQ*, 68 (2015), 899-931 (920).


Pain and Compassion in Early Modern Literature and Culture, Donne here ‘evokes late medieval and post-Tridentine Catholic attitudes towards pain, in which physical suffering is seen as a key to salvation’.\textsuperscript{28} Donne welcomes, even craves, ‘the workman’s hammer’, is prepared to be hammered out thin, because he knows that the ductile, tractable subject is defined by its pliancy—‘I come into the hands of my God… pliably… ductily…’—a condition which will in turn make it not only compliant with but also ‘led and conducted by the spirit of God’: ‘O make us so Tractable to his holy Motions, that we may experience his Heavenly Consolations’.\textsuperscript{29} A ductile disposition is desirable for the subject who seeks to position itself closer to God: tractability is attractive. ‘Batter my heart’: this is a subject who craves the agony of ecstasy.

We might consider Augustine’s Confessions, particularly its latter stages (from Book VII onwards), as a narrative of ecstasy, that is, a narrative that is driven by the desire for ecstatic union with and return to the divine. ‘Desire’ is, after all, as Peter Brooks suggests in his Reading for the Plot, a ‘narrative motor’: ‘[it] is always the re at the start of a narrative… [and] reache[s] a state of intensity such that movement must be created, motion undertaken, change begun’.\textsuperscript{30} Such desire—such change, such motion—is instilled in Augustine’s narrative from the moment he encounters Plotinus:

One who has seen the good, the desire of every soul, knows what I mean when I say it is beautiful.\textsuperscript{31} ‘The person who knows the truth knows it, and he who knows it knows eternity’, echoes Augustine (VII.x.122-3). What drives Augustine, to continue Brooks’ narrative metaphor,
is the hope of things to come: ‘a motion towards the end as yet unobtained’, as English priest and theologian Richard Hooker puts it.\footnote{Richard Hooker, \textit{Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Politie in Eight Bookes} (London: by John Windet, 1604), p. 77.} For, as Phillip Cary describes, channelling Augustine:

A lasting vision of God, when it comes, will metaphorically change us into God in the sense of causing us to participate in the incorruptibility of the divine nature. We shall be kept safe from all changes for the worse by our union with him. This is ultimate happiness and eternal rest, for once found it can never be lost.\footnote{Phillip Cary, ‘Book Seven: Inner Vision as the Goal of Augustine’s Life’, in \textit{A Reader’s Companion to Augustine’s Confessions}, ed. Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), pp. 107-126 (122).}

Or, as Robert Crofts has it, exploring how the mind works on the body in his \textit{Paradise Within Us} (1640), ‘that our fraile bodies shall be changed and made spirituall bodies like the glorious body of the Sonne of God, (Phil. 3, 21) With whom we shall enjoy infinite happinesse for ever’.\footnote{Robert Crofts, \textit{Paradise Within Us: or, The Happie Mind} (London: by B. Alsop and T. Fawcet, 1640), p. 146.} And, in what Kim Paffenroth considers ‘the true intellectual and spiritual climax of the book’, Augustine does finally attain this ‘ultimate happiness’ in a vision shared with his mother at Ostia:\footnote{Kim Paffenroth, ‘Book Nine: The Emotional Heart of the \textit{Confessions}’, in \textit{A Reader’s Companion to Augustine’s Confessions}, pp. 137-154 (142).}

Our discourse was once come unto that poynt, that the highest pleasure of the carnall sences, and that in the brightest beame of corporall lightsomenesse, was, in respect of the sweetenesse of that life, not onely not worthy of comparison, but not so much as of mention; wee chering up our selves with a more burning affection towards that, did by degrees course over all these corporeals: that is to say, the heaven it selfe, from whence both Sunne, and Moone, and starres doe shine upon this earth: yea wee soared higher yet, by inward musing, and discourse upon Thee, and by admiring of thy workes. And last of all, wee came to our owne soules which wee presently went beyond, that wee might aduance as high as that Region of never-wasting plenty.

(X.i.538-9)

Travelling ‘up[wards]’ and ‘beyond’ by ‘inward musing’, ‘soar[ing] higher’ by journeying in, Augustine articulates the spatial dynamics of faith that he has learned on his confessional journey, one which, as Leo C. Ferrari has noted, the narrative structure of
the *Confessions* places between two trees: the pear tree in Book II from which a sixteen year old Augustine steals fruit, and the fig tree under which he pauses just before his conversion in Book VIII.\(^{36}\) And now, at the close of his journey, Augustine finally achieves that ‘infinite happinesse forever’: that ‘never-ceasing ecstasy of joy and delight [which is] to find our selves united to him, the Almighty Lord’.\(^{37}\)

Or, so he had hoped. This is not the ‘lasting vision of God’ for which he longed, and once again Augustine returns to his body in anguish:

> Should this exaltation of spirite have ever continued, and all Other visions of a [f]arre inferior alloy beene quite taken away, and that this one exaltation should ravish us, and swallow us up, and so wrappe up their beholder among these more inward ioyes, as that his life might bee for ever like to this very moment of understanding which wee now sighed after.

\(\text{(x.5+2-3)}\)

At Ostia, Augustine seemingly achieves the ecstatic experience that he sought in Book VII, but this ‘one exaltation’ is not enough to contain—to ‘ravish … swallow … wrappe up’—its beholder ‘for euer’, but instead leaves its subjects sighing after its return, lost in nostalgia. Ecstasy can only ever be fleeting; ‘this [pious] ecstasy’, as Erasmus observes in a letter to theologian Maarten van Dorp, ‘is only a foretaste of the happiness to come, in which we shall be wholly absorbed into God and more in him than in ourselves’.\(^{38}\)

While this fleeting glimpse is, for Augustine, a cause of frustration and anguish, Donne would come to recognise this as a defining factor of the ecstatic experience; acknowledging the fleeting nature of ecstasy in his 1629 Easter Sermon, he recalls ‘that S. *Paul* in his extasie, in his rapture into the third heaven, did see that very light of glory, which constitutes the Beautifical vision, and yet did lose that sight again’.\(^{39}\) As Michael

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\(^{36}\) ‘Basic to the intrinsic dramatic structure of the *Confessions* is the fact that like the Bible it is polarized between two trees’, observes Leo C. Ferrari, ‘Book Eight: Science and the Fictional Conversion Scene’, in *A Reader’s Companion to Augustine’s Confessions*, pp. 127-36 (132).


\(^{39}\) Donne, *LXX Sermons*, p. 239.
Martin notes, ‘Paul’s ecstasy is Donne’s exemplum of Christian religious experience, precisely in the fact that ecstasy does not last this side of death’. ‘If there is to be an ecstasy’, he continues, ‘for Donne, there must be a thorn in the flesh’, and this is precisely what Augustine and his mother Monica discover:

Then sayd my Mother: Sonne, for mine owne part I have delight in nothing in this life, what I should here doe any longer, and to what end I am here, I know not, now that my hopes in this world are vanished.

(x.543-4)

The pain of ecstasy here is twofold. Having glimpsed the wonders that lie beyond and therefore ‘delight[ing] nothing in this life’, Monica departs this world for the next. But having ‘beene made one, out of hers and mine together’, having shared in a moment of ecstatic union not only with the divine but also with his mother, Augustine finds himself ‘destitute of so great a comfort’, his ‘very soule wounded’, his ‘life torne in pieces’ (xii.ii.552); ‘I cloased her eyes’, he recounts, ‘and there flowed withall an unspeakeable sorrow into my heart … mine eyes at the same time by the violent command of my mind, pump’t their Well drie, and wo was me in that same agony’ (i.549). What is perhaps most agonising about ecstasy here is that it reveals its inability fully to access the divine; this side of death ecstasy must come to an end, and pain is thus necessarily encountered in the return to a world where hopes ‘are vanished’. Religious ecstasy is, in other words, a promissory note of the eternal union that lies beyond, at a distance which death will eventually overcome.

For now, Augustine’s reconciliation with the divine remains, as Richard Kearney observes, in the future, and can therefore be ‘expressed only in narratives of hope, desire,

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faith, which point forward to a promised land that is not yet, a messianic era that transcends the here and now.\textsuperscript{42} Because of this, we might be inclined to revise Phillip Cary’s assertion that ‘the \textit{Confessions} is not an autobiography, but an account of how the soul wanders from God and returns to him’ in order to acknowledge more fully Augustine’s account of what happens in the interim: the \textit{Confessions} is simultaneously driven and frustrated by the narrative that the soul wanders from God and returns to him.\textsuperscript{43} While Augustine desires to return home, the journey is not so straightforward; ‘were not this as much, as Enter into thy Masters joy? (Mat. 25.21), he cites, before turning to question: ‘But when shall that bee?’ (x.543). Complete ecstatic union with the divine is, for Augustine, always deferred. But through Augustine’s keynote experiences in quest of that ultimate happiness, what Cary terms his ‘pilgrim journey’ through Books One to Nine, the \textit{Confessions} present a narrative of transformation via the dispersal and recovery of the self.\textsuperscript{44} This is a subject willing to be thrown beside himself, prepared to send himself out despite being repeatedly beaten back. It is in these acts of faith, and in the certainty of potential denial, that the ecstatic subject takes shape.

While Augustine might not get the homecoming he had hoped for when he set upon his ‘pilgrim journey’, he has nonetheless come a long way: ‘Thou shalt increase, O Lord, thy graces more and more upon mee, that my soule may follow my selfe home to thee’ (659). Having by now journeyed through the \textit{Confessions} to the moment that Petrarch read at the top of Mount Ventoux, we come to recognise the extent to which Augustine’s journey towards God has required steps towards himself:

A wonderfull admiration surprizes me, and an astonishment seazes me vpon this: that men go abroad to admire the heights of mountaines, the lofty billowes of the

\textsuperscript{43} Phillip Cary, ‘Book Seven: Inner Vision as the Goal of Augustine’s Life’, in \textit{A Reader’s Companion to Augustine’s Confessions}, pp. 107-26 (121).
\textsuperscript{44} Cary, p. 157.
sea, the long courses of riuers, the vast compasse of the Ocean, and the circular motions of the starres, and yet leaue them selues vnadmired.

(viii.vi.597)

‘This is’, Augustine states in Book X, ‘the fruit of my Confessions; not of what I have beene, but of what I am’ (v.577, emphasis added): just as Augustine’s pilgrimage journeys between two trees, it also charts the expanse between those pronouns. But ‘I am whatever I am’ is still some way from ‘I AM THAT I AM’ (x.383), and while Augustine’s narrative shifts into the present as it catches up with its narrator, there is still an anxiety surrounding the idea of being present: ‘so long therefore as I bee absent from thee, I am neerer vnto my selfe then vnto thee’ (v.580). Self can be too present, for such presence is marked by, and predicated upon, absence: self-presence only through divine absence; divine presence only through self-absence. This narrative becomes, as this chapter will now explore in more detail, entrenched in early modern religious discourse; ‘I am resolved’, asserts seventeenth-century clergyman and religious writer Edward Kellett, echoing Philippeans 1.23, ‘to lose my selfe in holy devotion … that I may find my Christ’. What is clear throughout Augustine’s articulations of his desire to ‘lose my selfe in holy devotion’, is that the first step towards the divine is to deny self: one cannot ‘Know thy selfe’ without first knowing God; one cannot find God without first losing oneself. As Calvin would suggest, this was a dynamic that cut both ways: ‘it is evident that man doth never come to the perfect knowledge of him selfe, unlesse hee have first beheld the face of God’. Thus when Augustine questions earlier in the Confessions ‘whereabouts was I, when I sought after thee?’ and comes to realise that ‘Thou wert directly before mee, but I had gone backe from thee; nor did I then finde my selfe, much lesse thee’ (Viii.211), he articulates precisely this dynamic of the fractured self that must recover and find itself

before it can hope to find God. Five books later, and Augustine is prepared to lend his recovered self to further discovery: ‘to such therefore will I discover my selfe, whom thou commandest mee to serue: not discovereing what I haue beene, but what I now am, and what I am yet’ (iv.iii.579). This is the journey of a subject that finds autonomy via abjection; a subject that, through out-going, journeys home to self.

What these early, foundational narratives of religious ecstasy bring into focus is the extent to which the subject must be willing to suffer the pain of self-departure, willing to endure dispersal, if it is to come back together reformed; that one must be willing to go outside if one is ever truly to ‘come home’. In the second section of this chapter, I will explore the religious poetry of George Herbert and John Donne—the latter a ‘second St Austine’ according to seventeenth-century divine Izaak Walton—as exemplars of subjects desiring to be ecstatically ‘loosed asunder’ and united with God.47 In so doing, I explore further the dynamics of faith that will inform Shakespeare’s conception of the ecstatic experience as one of movement: of out-going and homecoming. As Sir Richard Tempest has it (1649):

Here, in devout extasies, my soule loses it selfe, in those ravishments of divine love: I goe out of my selfe, in wonderment, not able to comprehend it; but joyfully throw myself into those depths, desiring to be comprehended by it.48

Here, in devout ecstasies, we will encounter the language of frustrated selflessness, informed by an impulse towards self-sacrifice, that is central to this study’s exploration of the ecstatic subject.

47 Cit. Martin, p. 49.
Our Soule, whose country is heaven, and God her father,
Into this world, corruptions sinke, is sent,
Yet, so much in her travaile she doth gather,
That she returns home, wiser than she went…

As Reformation Christianity shifted the responsibility for the quality of the relationship between God and his people from church to individual, from mediated to immediate, gaining God’s favour became an intensely personal experience and, accordingly, a personal problem. ‘No man’, asserts Martin Luther, ‘can be thoroughly humbled until he knows that his salvation is utterly beyond his powers, devices, endeavours, will, and works, and depends entirely on the choice, will, and work of another, namely, of God alone’. The devout subject must submit itself to God’s Will: divine grace cannot be merited, only given. If, as Alan Sinfield suggests, articulating this Protestant model, ‘we cannot ascend, only be lifted up’, then what we repeatedly find in the period’s devotional poetry are calls to the divine to raise the subject into ecstatic union: to take them home. Herbert’s refrain in ‘Home’ is one such plea for divine transportation:

Oh loose this frame, this knot of man untie!
That my free soul may use her wing,
Which now is pinion’d with mortalitie,
As an intangled, hamper’d thing.
   O show thy self to me,
   And take me up to thee!

Overcome with the desire to overcome himself, Herbert invokes the Platonic notion of the winged soul and contrasts it with the ‘knots’ and ‘ties’ of ‘mortalitie’ in which he finds

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49 Donne, ‘To Sir Henry Goodyear’ (1614), ll. 29-32.
51 Sinfield, p. 155.
himself ‘intangled’, lamenting that he should ‘stay and grone’ while ‘most of me to heav’n is fled’; his ‘thoughts and jokes are all packt up and gone’ while his ‘flesh and bones and joynts’ are left to ‘pray’ below. Herbert’s current ‘Home’ is not where his heart is, and thus he is unwilling to accept John Donne’s advice to ‘be … thine owne home, and in thy selfe dwell’.\(^{53}\) Instead he desires to go out and seek residence elsewhere:

   If thou stayest still, why must I stay?
   My God, what is this world to me,
   This world of wo? Hence all ye clouds, away,
   Away; I must get up and see.
   O show thy self to me,
   And take me up to thee!

(‘Home’, 101)

Because, for Herbert, the body is not ‘Home’ to the soul but rather the location of its exile: a home from home. And yet this desire to return home, to ‘get up and see’, is restricted by the ‘knot of man’ that perpetually holds these subjects back, the anchor that keeps the soul within the body. As we have seen, calls to loosen such knots and ties are similarly central to Donne’s conception of the ecstatic experience, as he too calls upwards—‘batter my heart’—and pleads to the divine to ‘Divorce mee, untie, or break that knot againe, | Take mee to you, imprison mee’.\(^{54}\) These are subjects that are painfully aware that ecstatic union requires loosening the knot, being untied and thrown beyond themselves. Surrender is a necessary and inevitable part of ecstasy. As Puritan Jacobite Henry Jessey confirms ‘you must be lost in your selfe that you may be found in him’.\(^{55}\) No union with God without first losing yourself, no homecoming for those who are not first willing to risk going outside.

But untying that knot, taking that step outside, can be painful, as The Flaming Heart, the autobiography of Spanish mystic and nun Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), makes

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all too clear:

That, which afflicted me, was the sharp, and bitter paine, which never gave me over, but vexed me, even all alike, from head to foot. For, the torment of the sinnewes, is a kinde of intollerable thing, as the Doctours affirm; and especially, when they all shrinke up, as mine did; and certainly, if I had not lost the merit of it, through mine owne fault, the torment was strong enough, to have intitled me to it.56

‘From head to foot’, Teresa’s body is painfully bound up with this spiritual experience. This language of ‘bitter paine’ provides for Teresa, as Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen notes, ‘a vocabulary for addressing the sense of alienation from the world, and the disintegration of self, which turning towards God brings with it’.57 For, as Jessey has advocated, self-loss must precede divine discovery; to turn towards God requires to some extent a turn away from or step outside of self. As van Dijkhuizen observes:

Teresa’s soul is ‘alienated even from her self’ and it seems that ‘she, and [God], were one, and the self-same thing, without division, or distinction’. This sense of becoming dead to the world is also painful in that it intensifies Teresa’s desire for a full mystical union with Christ that is as yet beyond her reach—she is in an inbetween state, both cut loose from the world and not yet one with Christ.58

Cut loose from Herbert’s ‘knot of man’—enduring what is, in her own words, ‘a kind of total untying, and loos[e]ning … from all things’—but not yet ‘one with Christ’, Teresa suffers the pain of liminal existence: suspended outside of herself she is, like so many others we are encountering in this study, caught in the between. But this agonising interim of ecstatic liminality is, for Teresa, a crucial stage in her spiritual process: ‘the Soule was purifyed by this paine; and for that it was burnished, & refined heer, as gold might be in the Chrysuble’.59 Teresa’s pain here might be understood, as Ariel Glucklich considers it in her study of Sacred Pain, as ‘an alchemical force, like the folger’s fire, which magically

57 van Dijkhuizen, p. 45.
58 van Dijkhuizen, p. 45.
59 St. Teresa, The Flaming Heart, p. 263.
transforms its victim from one state of existence to a higher, purer state’. After all, as Spenser notes, only the ‘refynd mind’ can ‘dwell | in His high thought’ and admire ‘heavenly light’. This ‘paine, and glorie together’, Teresa notes, ‘did carrie my understanding into such distraction, and disorder, that I knew not, how they both, could possibly consist together’. ‘O what it is to see the Soule so wounded!’: pliably, ductily, Teresa welcomes ‘the Fire and Hammer’, the alchemy of ecstasy.

What Teresa therefore shares with Donne, and inherits from Augustine, is an awareness that agonising ecstasy, the anguish of self-loss, brings with it the potential for transformation. ‘This pain is presented’, as van Dijkhuizen has it, ‘as a way of bringing about an inner transformation in the speaker: a method of dissolving, even destroying the speaker’s self, so that God can forge a new identity for him’. As Teresa notes, it is only divine love that allows the subject to follow its requisite trajectory, and to locate itself beyond itself:

The effects of this divine love, are many, but those principally, an extasy, by which the soul seemeth to goe out of her self with a servour of spirit, to be transformed into her beloved; then liquification, which is a kind of tendernesse, or melting of the soul, that the pores all open, she might draw the beloved into herself as a spunge doth water. Union by which they are united, and doe touch each other, mutuall inhesion by which [t]hey now united …

With ecstasy comes the potential for tender liquefaction, and with such melting of the soul comes union, tactility, mutual inhesion. Divine love—self-consciously borrowing the

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63 van Dijkhuizen, ‘Pain and Protestantism: From Lucas Cranach to John Donne’ in Living in Posterity: Essays in Honour of Bart Westerweel, ed. Jan Frans Van Dijkhuizen, Paul Hofijzer, Juliette Roding, and Paul Smith (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Veloren, 2004), pp. 75-86 (83). Dijkhuizen is careful to point out that remaining aware of the meaning of pain would take a deliberate effort, ‘since it can easily slide into its opposite. Pain could also be inflicted by the devil in an attempt to lead her into religious despair’, pp. 46-7. Problematically, Teresa is not always able to make distinctions between the paradoxical joy of mystical pain and pain which is demonically inflicted.
rhetoric of the ‘beloved’, whereby ‘mutuall inhesion’ refers not to divine union but rather to the ‘melt[ing] … pleasure [experienced] in carnal copulation’—encourages the subject to be open to vulnerable experience. Highlighting the devout subject’s liquidity and its porous bodily borders, Teresa identifies what James Kuzner has termed ‘open’ subjectivity, an experience of living in a world ‘where what is inside and what is outside individual boundaries become inseparably, dynamically and sometimes indistinguishably tied to each other, where individuals do not make connections, so much as they become those connections’. For Teresa, divine love enables such a transformation of self into Other, a ‘transformation by which she [is] to be changed’ into the object of her affections: not only to be connected, but, in Kuzner’s terms, to become that connection.

These metaphors of transformation via dissolution, melting, and liquefaction are a frequent feature of ecstatic devotion, with Paul’s ‘desire to be loosed, and to be with Christ’ (Phil. 1:23) figuring as a keynote claim of those who acknowledge that being ‘employ’d on High’ will see the ‘ravish’d Soul dissolve[d] in Ecstasie’: those who desire to know ‘what extasies, meltings, [and] transports … gratious souls meet’ when they are ‘ravished with the discoveries of Christ in the Gospel’. This image of the subject ‘ravished’ by the divine—from the French ravir: to seize or snatch, and etymologically implying a (typically female) subject carried away with some force—is perhaps most famously captured by Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s white marble sculpture (figure 1), the ‘Ecstasy of St. Teresa’ (c.1647-52), which emphasizes the erotic overtones of an ecstasy-inducing ‘dart’. This moment, also referred to as ‘The Transverberation of St Teresa’—

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65 Giovanni Torriano, *The Second Alphabet* (London: by A. Warren, 1662), p. 201. This rhetoric of melting and dissolving into ecstasy is similarly a large feature of sexual and romantic poetry, and is discussed in more detail in the third chapter of this study.

66 Kuzner, *Open Subjects*, p. 3.

67 St. Teresa, *The Third Part of the Soul’s Delight*, p. 105.

a word which Henry Cockeram defines as meaning ‘to strike thorow’—represents the capacity for the heavenly to pierce through all things.\textsuperscript{69} ‘I saw an Angell very neer me, towards my left side’, recounts Teresa:

I saw, that he has a long Dart of gold in his hand; and at the end of the iron below, me thought, there was a little fire; and I conceaved, that he thrust it, some several times, through my verie Hart, after such a manner, as that it passed the verie inwards, of my Bowells; and when he drew it back, me thought, it carried away, as much, as it had touched within me; and left all that, which remained, wholly inflamed with a great loue of Almighty God. The paine of it, was so excessiue, that it forced me to vtter those groanes; and the suauitie, which that extremitie of paine gaue, was also so very excessiue, that there was no desiring at all, to be ridd of it; nor can the Soule then, receaue anie contentment at all, in lesse, then God Almightye himself. This is no Corporall, but a Spirituall paine; though yet the Bodie doe not faile, to partici part thereof; yea and that, not a little. And it is such a deare, delightfull kind of entercourse, which passes heer, between the Soule, and Almightye God, as I beseech him of his infinit goodnes, that he will giue some touch, or tast of it, to whosoeuer shall beleiue, that I lye. During the time, when I was in this state, I went, up, and downe that world, like an odd kind of transported Foole; neither cared I, either to see anie thing, or to speake; but contented my self to consume, with burning-up in my paine, which was to be the greatest glorie for me, that this whole world could affoard.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{69} Henry Cockeram, \textit{The English Dictionarie} (London: by Eliot’s Court Press, 1623), sig. L7.
\textsuperscript{70} St. Teresa, \textit{The Flaming Hart}, pp. 420-1.
Teresa here describes an experience of ecstatic *jouissance*, a ‘delightfull kind of entercourse’, that blurs the boundary between divine and erotic rapture. As much as this is a spiritual experience, Bernini’s sculpture reflects Teresa’s assertion that ‘the Bodie did not faile, to participate some part thereof’. Framed by luminous golden rays, Teresa reclines gently, her body engulfed by a volume of folds that give way only to reveal bare feet, gently postured hands whose fingers, in their slight tension, convey an occasion of trembling momentariness, and a face absorbed in ecstasy.\(^7\) As Teresa articulated, this is

\(^7\) Robert T. Petersson suggests that Teresa’s ‘bare feet alude to her having founded the Order of
an experience that involves the entire body, ‘from head to foot’. As the angel in Bernini’s sculpture lifts Teresa’s robes to reveal flesh that is held just out of view, we are both invited to witness and held at a distance from this moment of religious sublimity and sexual bliss: Teresa’s body simultaneously renders the moment legible, visable, but Bernini also keeps something withheld, unknowable. The sculpture is, for Victoria Turvey Sauron, ‘spectacularly transgressive of the traditionally-conceived boundaries between the sacred and the erotic, body and soul, but also inside and outside’. Or, as Amy Hollywood notes, channelling Luce Irigary, ‘only this divine being understands the radicality of a desire whose violence, experiences as ecstatic jouissance, generates the shattering of boundaries between inside and outside, subject and other’. The ecstatic experience, very simply, undermines and subverts these boundaries.

Indeed, while we saw in the previous chapter how the porous female body lent itself more readily to divine influence, moments of eroticised religious ecstasy were not unavailable to men. As well as figuring the ecstasy of St. Teresa in orgasmic terms, for instance, metaphysical poet Richard Crawshaw (1613-1649) also depicts the ecstasy of a male body:

O how oft shalt thou complain  
Of a sweet and subtle paine?  
Of intolerable joyes?  
Of a death in which who dyes  
Loves his death, and dyes again,  
And would for ever be so slain!

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The overlap between discussions of ecstasy and death are explored more fully in Chapter Three of this thesis.


Just as the critics above observed in depictions of Teresa’s ecstasy a blurring of boundaries, Crawshaw’s sequence of poems on Teresa adopts notions of corporeal permeability and interpenetration in order to unsettle the conventionally gendered subject positions of ravisher and ravished, penetrator and penetrated. As Richard Rambuss has considered, these positions ‘can variously and successively be taken on by male, female, and undecidably gendered devotional bodies as they are rendered ecstatically expressive, devotionally stimulated’.\(^\text{75}\) Indeed, in Crawshaw’s ‘The Flaming Heart’, ‘a well-plac’d and wise mistake’ (8) means that readers must ‘read HIM for her, and her for him’ (11); the dichotomies of gender and sexuality are manipulated and so present an experience not of ‘gender trouble’, in Judith Butler’s terms, but rather, as Rambuss has it, ‘a kind of gender ecstasy’: an experience in which the subject dissolves the binaries of gender and moves fluidly between the two.\(^\text{76}\) As ecstasy renders fluid the traditional boundaries of self, Teresa wields ‘love’s manly flame’ (24), and it is instead the speaker of the poem who desires the ecstasy-inducing dart:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{By all of HIM we have in THEE} \\
\text{Leave nothing of my SELF in me.} \\
\text{Let me so read thy life, that I} \\
\text{Unto all life of mine may dy.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(‘The Flaming Heart’, 105-8)

Informed by Teresa’s ecstasy, and using poetry to share in that experience, Crawshaw’s poetic subject desires to be dissolved and absorbed into the divine, desiring to achieve self-trancendence and reformation via self-annihilation. Articulating the paradoxical experience ‘of living DEATH and dying LIFE’, whereby the subject can only announce ‘I live in thee’ after a claim of being ‘dead to my selfe’ (‘A Song’, 14; 16), Crawshaw inherits a sense of ecstasy as an experience that pushes the subject to its limits. A


\(^\text{76}\) Rambuss, 42. This link to Judith Butler feels to me implicit in Rasmus’ writing.
promissory note of the divine union to come, only ecstasy can balance this sensation of ‘living DEATH and dying LIFE’.

This characteristic disposition towards self-evacuation and self-dissolution is shared by Catherine Clément’s syncopic subject, which receives sustained attention in the following chapter’s exploration of loving and sexual ecstasy: ‘I want to displace self, I wanted to dissolve self’. As Clément observes and Teresa might agree, ‘when the[se] subjective frontiers dissolve, when the subject melts into syncope, into ecstasy … [it] finds itself in the other’. This desire to dissolve self is rather a desire to dissolve the boundary between self and other: dissolution facilitates union. Thus, Herbert pleads not only for ‘this knot of man’ to be ‘untie[d]’, but for the divine to ‘dissolve the knot’ altogether (‘Affliction IV’, 22) as he desires for the dissolution, tactility, and union outlined by Teresa. Lamenting the ‘strange distance’ between himself and the divine, Herbert tries to enact union first by improving proximity:

Since my grief must be as large,
   As is thy space,
Thy distance from me; see my charge,
   Lord, see my case.

O take these bars, these lengths away;
   Turn, and restore me.

(‘The Search’, 45-50)

Agonised by an ‘absence [which] doth excel | All distance’, and with grief a corollary of space, Herbert urges the divine to ‘turn’ and approach, to shorten ‘lengths’ and ‘be near’ enough that no ‘point’ will be ‘piercing’ enough ‘to come between’ them (53-6). Just as God’s absence exceeds all distance, Herbert imagines divine presence in terms of a radical ‘nearness’ that is capable of expelling distance altogether, ‘making two one’ (60). Very simply, with ‘distance’ comes the desire for ‘no space’ (PhT, 30).

77 Clément, p. 252.
78 Clément, p. 220.
Aware that indwelling presupposes outgoing, that the devotional subject must reflect inwardly before they can ultimately ascend and attain divine union, Herbert moves to explore the internal recesses of the self. Indeed, as the structure of ‘The Temple’ suggests in its movement from ‘Church Porch’, through the ‘Superliminare’ (which self-consciously signals a transgression of the limin), and into ‘The Church’, architectural space and the dialectics between inside and outside are central to Herbert’s conception of both faith and selfhood. Such a move inward, he notes, demands that certain things be left at the door: ‘Avoid, Profaneness; come not here: | Nothing but holy, pure, and clear’ (‘Superliminare’, 5-6). This journey inwards demands purification—‘acquit thee bravely’ (‘The Church Porch’, 457)—and so the subject must empty itself of that which ‘doth pollute and foul’ (7) body and soul—‘spit out thy phlegm’ (91)—in order to be ‘fill[ed] … with glory’ (91). The ‘radical reflexivity’ that is, for Charles Taylor, a hallmark of Augustinian inwardness is, therefore, similarly identifiable in Herbert’s insistence that his subject take this moment on the Church Porch to ‘salute thyself’ and ‘see what thy soul doth wear’.79

Dare to look in thy chest; for ‘tis thine own:  
And tumble up and down what thou find’st there.  
Who cannot rest till he good fellows find,  
He breaks up house, turns out of doors his mind.  

(145-50)

Self-reflexivity demands that we be prepared to ‘break up house’ and turn ourselves (or, more specifically, our sinful selves) out of doors.80 And yet Herbert is clear that the subject must remain in control at all times, must ‘keep … guard upon himself’ (139), must be careful not to ‘lose thy hold’ (41). ‘Man is a shop of rules’ (141): Herbert’s stoic position

79 Taylor, p. 130.
80 Montaigne explores the inverse of this architectural model of the self in his essay ‘Of Solitarinesse’, asserting that ‘We should reserve a store-house for our selves, … wherein we may hoard-up, and establish our true libertie, and principall retreit and solitarinesse, wherein we must go alone to our selves,’ I.39.120.
here is not incidental, but is reflective of architectural positioning—his ‘Church-Porch’
recalling the ‘painted Stoa’, to borrow Milton’s phrase, from which Stoicism owes its
name. This emptying of the sinful self is in turn crucial to the subject’s moral
restructuring, itself an architectural endeavour that will ultimately provide space for the
divine to enter, for He knows the way:

Only thy grace, which with these elements comes,
Knoweth the ready way,
And hath the privie key,
Op’ning the souls most subtile rooms;
While those to spirits refin’d, at doore attend
Dispatches from their friend.

(‘The Holy Communion’, 19-24)

Adopting the model that Teresa advocated, Herbert’s subject renders itself porous and
open, making available even the ‘soul’s … most subtile rooms’ in the hope of drawing in
divine grace. The self, in this, is an empty space eagerly awaiting ‘the inhabitation of
Gods holy spirit’.

In ‘Holy Communion’, Herbert invites us to think more specifically about the
ways in which the devout subject is nourished by God’s presence, and the modes of
presence that quite literally provide nourishment. ‘He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh
my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him’ (John, 6.56): correlating devotion with digestion,
Michael Schoenfelt has discussed Herbert’s consuming subject as one for whom food
provided ‘a primal occasion and an apt medium for exploring … inwardness’; ‘as food
progresses from the external liturgies of sacred and secular consumption to the internal
labyrinths of digestion,’ Schoenfeldt asserts, ‘it traces for Herbert the inner contours of

portico or roofed colonnade, such as that where Zeno lectured, and from which his disciples were
called Stoics. Michael C. Schoenfeldt observes this pun and the stoic sentiment of Herbert’s ‘The
Church-Porch’ in his chapter on Herbert’s ‘consuming subject’—*Bodies and Selves in Early Modern
England*, pp. 96-130.
the devotional subject'. Studies of food in *The Temple* have questioned how far Herbert subscribes to contemporary English Protestant views on the relationship between the Eucharist and ‘real presence’. For R. V. Young, Herbert’s discussion of wine in ‘The Invitation’—‘which before ye drink is bloud’ (l.12)—demonstrates ‘a belief in the real presence in some substantial mode’, and Herbert’s interest in what it means to experience and receive communion is one that, for Sophie Read, is at times ‘tantamount to subscribing to the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation’. To re-direct slightly this focus on Herbert’s Eucharistic beliefs to consider depictions of the spiritual nature of that experience, I will suggest, is to foreground Herbert’s interest in an experience that is able to remove the distance between devout subject and the divine. What has previously been understood as an experience of ‘having some little fore-taste of him … in an holy extasy’, where a subject might ‘on a sudden fall into an Ecstasy, as if he had then tasted of the Joys of Paradise’, now, like the divinely intoxicated subjects of the previous chapter, literally involves tasting: devout tractability now crucially involves digestive traction—‘O what alterations, what alienation, what extasies do they feel in and after Communion!’

‘When Christians participate in the Eucharist’, notes David Steinmetz:

They ascend in the ecstasy of faith to the right hand of God, where they contemplate the risen Christ, seated at the right hand of God the Father. This spiritual experience of believers, the sursum corda of their faith, is one … ladder linking heaven and earth.

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83 Schoenfeldt, p. 96.
Ecstasy is here once again articulated along a vertical axis, with participation in the Eucharist designating a two-way motion: the sacred meal brings the divine into the body, and the soul in turn ascends to heaven in ecstatic and contemplative union. This connection between Eucharist and ecstasy has been identified as stretching back to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with German beguine Mechtild of Magdeburg (d. c.1282) describing both experiences as ‘eating God’.88 As critics such as Caroline Walker Bynum have demonstrated, Eucharistic piety and miracle is predominantly associated with women, whose accounts of Eucharistic devotion are often articulated as intensely erotic experiences.89 As thirteenth-century Flemish mystic Hadewich recounts:

He gave himself to me in the shape of the Sacrament, in its outward form … and then he gave me to drink from the chalice. … After that he came himself to me, took me entirely in his arms, and pressed me to him. … So I was outwardly satisfied and fully transported. Also, then, for a short while, I had the strength to bear this; but soon, after a short time, I lost that manly beauty outwardly in the sight of his form. I saw him completely come to nought and so fade and all at once dissolve that I could no longer distinguish him within me. Then it was to me as if we were one without difference.90

The orgasmic union of this vision—where lover is so completely dissolved into beloved that difference is abolished—enacts the ‘mutuall inhesion’ and subjective dissolution that Herbert’s consuming subject aspires to. In ‘The Holy Communion’, Herbert welcomes the divine into the labyrinthine passageways of his body: ‘by the way of nourishment and strength | Thou creep’st into my breast’ (7-8). As the divine ‘creep[s]’ through the digestive tract, Herbert again articulates faith in agonisingly spatial terms. For while the internal spaces of Herbert’s physiological self might represent and map on to the psychological, spiritual self—‘thy small qualities … spread their forces into every part’ (10-11)—these metaphors of devotional interiority can seemingly only stretch so far:

Yet can these not get over to my soul,
Leaping the wall that parts
Our souls and fleshly hearts;
But as th’outworks, they may control
My rebel-flesh, and carrying thy name,
Affright both sin and shame.

(13-18)

God’s ‘small qualities’ are, it seems, unable to traverse the ‘wall that parts’ soul from flesh: total union is obstructed by the body’s internal architecture. This concern is, however, fleeting, for the Eucharistic feast is ultimately able to overcome the distance, to ‘control’ the body’s ‘rebel flesh’ that threatened impediment: ‘And as the worde was made fleshe by an unspeakable union, so wee by eating that fleshe, are ioyned to him, by an unspeakable union’.91 But the return to these anxieties in ‘The Holy Communion’ of the William’s manuscript, not included in The Temple, reveals Herbert’s doubts as to whether communion can, at least for him, truly offer total incorporation:

Into my soul this cannot pass;
Flesh (though exalted) keeps his grass
And cannot turn to soul.

(37-39)

‘Bodies and Minds’, he continues, ‘are different Spheres’, and are thus destined to ‘keep a constant pole’ (40-42). Frustrated by an unbridgeable distance, Herbert’s quest to ‘mak[e] two one’ seems unattainable, and thus the subject is left without contact: no ‘mouth in mouth, heart in heart, body in body, soul in soul’.92 Divine love can be overwhelming; Herbert’s desire for union is all consuming.

We feel in Herbert’s poetry, then, an intensely spatial conception of faith and selfhood that is accordingly motivated by the desire to achieve presence through the annihilation of distance, to dissolve self into other and vice versa. This chiasmic effect is one enacted in Herbert’s ‘Clasping of Hands’, signalling a movement that for Maurice

Merleau-Ponty ‘encodes mutuality’, an action that ‘initiates a kind of reflection’ as one hand takes another—be it the imagined hand of God, or one hand meeting another in prayer.\(^93\) It is with this action that Herbert reflects, and seeks reflection:

\[
\text{Lord, thou art mine, and I am thine,}
\text{If mine I am: and thine much more,}
\text{Than I or ought, or can be mine.}
\]

(1-3)

In terms that Nancy Selleck’s study of sixteenth and seventeenth century notions of interpersonal subjectivity would find appropriate, ‘identity’ here quite literally ‘starts with the other’, as Herbert’s subject acknowledges and negotiates a reflexive two-way exchange of identity.\(^94\) This transacted self comes dizzyingly close to being emptied of self altogether; Herbert asserts that ‘I am thine,’ but takes pause at the end of the line to recognise that in these circumstances such a claim needs qualification: ‘if mine I am’. For the subject at once resides both at home and beside himself in the divine, and is thus left negotiating the interim: to collapse either way would be to lose ‘thee’ or ‘me’, and both are crucial to who ‘T am: ‘I without thee would [just] be mine’ (l.10). Or, as Augustine would have it, ‘if I remaine not in him, I shall never bee able to doe it in my selfe’ (Confessions, XII.xi.384). The poem thus carefully keeps the two in balance: in, to recall Merleau-Ponty’s phrase, ‘a kind of reflection’. For as the poem’s opening line—‘Lord, thou art mine, and I am thine’—reverses itself in the second stanza—‘Lord, I am thine, and thou art mine’ (11)—the verse recalibrates itself accordingly:

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\(^94\) Selleck, p. 38.
Such excessive interplay of possessive pronouns puts Herbert’s ‘I’ at risk of being ‘mine[d]’, plundered and prevented from making of any claim to self altogether. But this is precisely the point, for as is ultimately encapsulated in the poem’s final couplet, Herbert longs to move beyond these pronouns: to eliminate the distance that they represent by eliminating the very words themselves:

O be mine still! still make me thine!
   Or rather make no Thine and Mine!

(19-20)

Frustrated by the distance between these two distinct words and the selves that they represent—‘Thine’ and ‘Mine’ here graphically obstructed from one another by the ‘and’ that stands between them—Herbert emphatically calls for their annihilation. Like Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet who long to throw off the linguistic designations that threaten to keep them apart—‘Romeo, doff thy name, | And … take all myself’—Herbert seeks to ‘tear the word’ (Rom., II.ii.49-51; 57). Just as Romeo and Juliet merge into one as they meet ‘palm to palm’ (I.v.99) and experience what Farah Karim-Cooper considers in her study of early modern gesture to be ‘love at first touch’, the clasping of hands in Herbert’s poem becomes, in Stephen B. Dobranski’s terms, ‘a symbol of rapturous dissolution as the speaker urgently strives for a complete identification with his
beloved God’.55 ‘[M]ake no Thine and Mine!’: though this is something not yet arrived at, Herbert here calls, hands clasped, for no ‘Thine’, no ‘Mine’, but instead for something beyond language and beyond self: for that which is, very simply, ‘something understood’ (‘Prayer I’, 14).

But any such absolute union with the divine is, for John Donne, not something that can be attained this side of death. ‘It may be fairly argued’, he asserts in a sermon preached at Saint Paul’s, for Easter-Day (1628):

That neither Adam in his extasie in Paradise, nor Moses in his conversation in the Mount, nor the other Apostles in the Transfiguration of Christ, nor S. Paul in his rapture to the third heavens, saw the Essence of God, because he that is admitted to that sight of God, can never look off, nor lose that sight againe. Only in heaven shall God proceed to this patefaction, this manifestation, this revelation of himself; And that by the light of glory.96

Examining the visions of God presented in the Bible, Donne objects to the idea that these ecstatic subjects can have truly been ‘admitted to that sight of God’, for, as Paul tells us: ‘now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face’ (I Corinthians, 14:12). Hadewich’s desire to be ‘mouth in mouth, heart in heart, body in body, soul in soul’ is, in other words, only available after death, for it is only then that the subject comes ‘face to face’ with God. The ecstatic narrative in this sense risks being agonisingly misleading, and thus Donne comes to reject the ‘medieval thought about the ways of “The School” to “union with God”’:

A great limbe of the Schoole … [places] this union with God, In visione, in this, That in heaven I shall see God, see God essentially, God face to face, God as he is. We do not see one another so, in this world; In this world we see but outsaides; In heaven I shall see God, and God essentially. … In this world we enjoy nothing; enjoying presumes perpetuity; and here, all things are fluid, transitory: There I shall enjoy, and possesse for ever, God himself.97

Carefully demarcating the experiences of ‘this world’ with those that will be made available to us ‘in heaven’, Donne seemingly goes against figures such as Aquinas who maintained the view that ecstatic union with God was possible in this life; ‘The mind of one who sees God’, notes Aquinas, ‘is assimilated to what it sees in God by being joined to the divine essence, in which the likeness of all things pre-exist’. As Merritt Y. Hughes has suggested, Donne began to write ‘for an audience which had rejected its faith in ecstasy as Aquinas understood it’.

Instead, the ecstatic experience provided Donne with a way of thinking about the construction of selfhood via the other in more metaphorical terms: where identity is constituted through the action of sending oneself out, and receiving oneself back. Thus, as we heard in the Introduction to this thesis, Donne comes to consider the ‘writing of letters’ as ‘a kind of extasie’—as ‘a departure and secession and suspension of the soul, which doth then communicate itself to two bodies’—and accordingly to ‘deliver [him]self over in writing’. Turning the pathways of devotional correspondence into letter networks, Donne provides a metaphor that actualizes what this study considers to be the period’s conception of ecstasy as an intensely spatial experience. And yet rather than seeking to overcome the space between self and other, Donne is willing to occupy (even maintain) the liminal gap that such a departure from self necessarily opens. Thus the ‘Clasping of Hands’ that was for Herbert an attempt to collapse the distance between self and Other, is a gesture that for Donne’s ecstatic lovers simultaneously offers both

99 Hughes, p. 513; Ecstasy as an experience that pertained to divine union seems to have been taken less and less seriously, with many readers in the sixteenth century beginning to regard such experiences as supernatural or diabolical. Hughes aligns this view with the presented by Jean Bodin in his chapter on ‘Du Ravissement ou Ecstase, des Sorciers, & des frequentations ordinaires, qu’ilz ont avec les Daemons’ in *De la Demonamania des Sourciers*(Paris: s.n., 1580)—see Hughes, p. 513.
mutual incorporation and extension:

Our hands were firmely cimented  
With a fast balme, which thence did spring,  
Our eye-beames twisted, and did thred  
Our eyes, upon one double string,  
So to’entergraft our hands, as yet,  
Was all the means to make us one,  
And pictures in our eyes to get  
Was all our propagation.  

(‘The Extasie’, 5-12)

Donne’s ‘Extasie’—an experience of union between lovers rather than devout subject and the divine—achieves in some crucial sense what Herbert could not. For here the ‘fast balme’ that ‘entergraft[s]’ hand with hand also manages to ‘firmely ciment’ ‘thine’ and ‘mine’ into ‘Our … Our … Our … our … our … our’: such are ‘all the means to make us one’. With a ‘single violet transplant’ (37) these ‘severall’ (33) entities—the ‘[d]efects of loneliness’ (44)—are ‘concot[ed]’ (27) and ‘interanimat[ed]’ (42) into a ‘mixt’ (35), ‘abler soul’ (43), thus realising the alchemy of ecstasy that the subjects of this chapter have longed after. And yet, as Selleck has noted, ‘the interest here is not so much in oneness but in extension’; this is a celebration of ‘souls … which advance their state’ (15), which ‘go … out’ and allow themselves to ‘h[a]ng’ (16), ‘suspend[ed]’ (14), ‘negotiat[ing]’ (17) the interim.101 In these circumstances, ‘distance’ is not agonisingly threatening, but is ‘convenient’ (24), not ‘a breach, but an expansion’ (Donne, ‘Valediction Forbidding Mourning’, 23). Donne advocates ecstatic outgoing as an experience that leaves the subject ‘so much refin’d’ (‘Valediction Forbidding Mourning’, 17), from which the subject returns to itself ‘farre purer than he came’ (‘The Extasie’, 28): ‘That she returns home, wiser than she went’. We must, he insists, be willing to be ‘throwne, | And in due time throwne out againe’ (Donne, ‘Metempsychosis’, 301-2) for, to recall Richard Sibbes, ‘we are never ourselves perfectly till we have wholly put of our selves’.102

101 Selleck, p. 5.  
102 Sibbes, The Soule’s Conflict, p. 110.
Central to early modern narratives of religious ecstasy, this chapter has shown, is a desire to journey out of oneself in order to achieve union with the divine. Informed by and drawing upon the works of key religious figures such as St. Augustine and St. Teresa, the devotional work of poets such as Donne, Herbert, and Crawshaw articulate this desire to travel beyond the self, to lose oneself in order to locate identity with God. Having established how period writers articulated and explored religious ecstasy as an intensely spatial experience—as a journey out of and departure from oneself—I now turn to consider the ways in which the Shakespearean subject is willing to oblige these dynamics of faith. With the subjects of this chapter having thus far advocated the necessity of outgoing and the value of vulnerability, what follows sees those pathways of devotional correspondence literalized in the movement of the Shakespearean subject in Hamlet and A Midsummer Night's Dream. What these texts offer, I will argue, are secular versions of inherited models of religious ecstasy.
III. FAILURE TO LAUNCH: SHAKESPEARE’S ECSTATIC NARRATIVES

In *Shakespeare’s Religious Language: A Dictionary*, Rudolph Chris Hassel Jr. ‘attempt[s]… to include all of the words in Shakespeare with any religious nuance’, the result being a ‘dictionary [which] contains over 1000 keywords which have some religious denotation or connotation’. From this comprehensive catalogue, ‘ecstasy’ is absent. Indeed, the absence of Shakespeare from the preceding discussion of religious ecstasy in early modern culture and literature perhaps goes some way to support Hassel’s decision, for while this thesis highlights his interest in and use of the term, Shakespeare’s exploration of ‘ecstasy’ and the ecstatic experience are seemingly at a remove from this divine context.

There are, however, a number of characters who echo the discussions of an ecstatic separation of body and soul heard in this study so far; from Anne Boleyn’s anxiety about the ‘panging | Of soul and body’s severing’ (*H8*, II.iii.16) after death, to Count Mulen’s desire to be borne from the battle field so that his ‘body and soul’ might be ‘part[ed] … with contemplation and devout desires’ (*Jn.*, V.iii.47-8), notions of the dislocation of body and soul are given voice in recognisably sacred terms. And yet while a character like Catherine of Aragon describes ‘meditating | On that celestial harmony I go to’ (*H8*, IV.ii.79-80), such moments of devout meditation are seldom presented as temporary moments of divine inspiration, but are rather meditations on, or preparations for, that ultimate union with God that comes only once life has ended. If ‘death and ecstasy are both seen as a matter of the soul’s “emigrating” to another place’, as M. A. Screech puts it, Shakespeare’s characters are, at least ostensibly, only ever interested in the former, with the soul’s journey towards and union with God taking place at the moment of death.

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rather than seeking, as Erasmus had it in the previous chapter, an ecstatic ‘foretaste of the happiness to come’.  

Put simply, the ‘heavenly bliss’ (3H6, III.iii.182) of union with the divine is seemingly not available to Shakespeare’s characters this side of death, nor is it something that particularly motivates them. And yet while religious ecstasy is in this sense denied, Shakespeare, like Donne, can be seen as inheriting and appropriating the received language of ecstatic aspiration and frustrated selflessness. Informed by the previous sections of this chapter which have explored the failure of ecstatic narratives in Augustine’s Confessions, and the frustrated desire to achieve the ecstasy of divine union in early modern devotional poetry, what follows first considers the ways in which escapist transcendence is unavailable and denied in Hamlet, before turning to explore the failure to appropriate religious ecstasy in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. While for Donne the ecstatic experience figures itself spatially in terms of devotional and literal correspondence, and for Herbert the transports of spiritual encounter carry the aspirational subject up towards the divine, for Shakespeare, conversely, the ecstatic experience appears to remain the preserve of the common man. At a time when ‘the Christian God could not be represented on stage without profanity’, I will demonstrate the extent to which Shakespeare explores secular alternatives to the models of ecstasis seen elsewhere in this chapter.

i) ‘I STAND IN PAUSE’: DIS-TRACTION IN HAMLET

Just as Augustine tested the limits of the ecstatic narrative at the outset of this chapter, a character such as Claudius is similarly tortured by his failure to achieve the ecstasy of ascension through prayer.

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104 Michael Andrew Screech, Ecstasy and The Praise of Folly, p. 139.
Pray can I not:
Though inclination be as sharp as will,
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent
And like a man to double business bound
I stand in pause where I shall first begin
And both neglect. …
And what’s in prayer but this twofold force
—To be forestalled ere we come to fall
Or pardoned, being down? Then I’ll look up:
My fault is past. But O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? …
O wretched state, O bosom black as death,
O limed soul that struggling to be free
Art more engaged. Help, angels, make assay.

(Ham., III.iii.38-69)

Knees bent, hands together, Claudius adopts the position that for Herbert’s subject had the potential to bring about rapturous union with the divine. According to Benedictine mystic Augustine Baker (1575-1641), whose writing on mystical experience emphasizes the individual’s journey and encourages spiritual freedom, ‘some are so wholly given up to this fashion of Prayer, that they are allwaies in a kind of Extasy’, for, as Thomas Burnford would later concur, ‘there is no Action whereby we approach nearer to God, no time wherein he communicate himself more to us’.106 As we have seen, prayer provided the devotional subject with a medium of divine correspondence: a notion of facilitated transmission that continually motivated figures like St. Augustine, St. Teresa, and Herbert to ‘look up’ in the hope of achieving identity with the divine. This is, after all, a model that seems to have been available elsewhere:

In praying St Peter fell into an Extasie, Paul was ravisht to the third Heaven; Cornelius in his Prayers receiv’d the Vision of an Angel: Monica St Austin’s Mother after her Prayers and Tears for the Salvation of her Son, had in her dream that excellent Revelation of his Conversion.107

107 Burnford, p. 212.
Recounting these famous biblical ecstasies, Burnford emphasizes prayer as a catalyst for such experience. But Claudius’ prayer scene is not a moment of ecstatic movement, but rather one of ‘pause’: Claudius’ vocabulary, which informs my reading of the play that follows, emphasizes not flight and departure, but rather enforced anchorage and a failure-to-depart. ‘Pray can I not’: in a play that rings with claims of ecstasy—indeed, it is in *Hamlet* that Shakespeare uses the word most frequently—the ecstatic experience is here paradoxically denied. As if in answer to Francis de Sale’s discussion of ‘a soule in Praier of Union, even unto Extasie’, Claudius asks ‘what form of prayer can serve my turn?’; to the question ‘who is more united, joined, and fastened to God … [than] the soule that praiies?’, he replies ‘pray can I not’.

While elsewhere a claim like ‘I stand in pause’ might figure as a keynote claim of ecstatic liminality whereby the soul stands forth from the body—one heard for instance in Donne’s discussion of souls which ‘advance their state’ and thus leave bodies ‘like sepulchral statues’ (*The Extasie*, 18), and one which is explored in more detail in Chapter Three—it here only serves to intensify Claudius’ agonizing stasis. ‘I stand in pause’ is here not an assertion of being thrown from or beside oneself, but quite the inverse: this is a soul that is kept down, kept bound, and denied the freedom it longs after. ‘O limed soul that struggling to be free | Art more engaged’: with ‘stubborn knees’ that refuse to bend, a ‘heart with strings’ (70) that are ‘too, too solid’ (I.i.129), and ‘thoughts’ that are unable to ‘fly up’ with ‘words’, Claudius grows painfully aware that his soul is stuck or, more properly, is ‘sticky’ (*OED*, ‘limed’, adj.1: smeared with birdlime or other similarly sticky substances). Just as ‘Lyme [could be used to] catche ye starlyngs in ye church’, Claudius’ ‘limed soul’ is denied ascension because it is caught ‘below’. As republican theorist and seventeenth-century commentator James Harrington articulates

in his divine meditations on the Christian faith:

Methinks the very Contemplation of this life, should so ravish my Soul, and actuate these Wings, these Feet, that they should not only brake Prison, but carry her up in an holy extasie to these glorious Mansions. ... But alack poor Soul, how are thy Wings limed, thy Feet lamed, thy Chariot-wheels clog'd, with Earth, and Sins?\(^{109}\)

Claudius’ ‘struggling’ soul is unable to ‘engage’ in union with the divine because the act of struggling only intensifies its bond with the body: ‘like the foule which is once limed, the more she striueth, the faster she tieth her self’.\(^{110}\) As English clergyman Thomas Adams writes of St. Peter, ‘his feathers were limed, his soule so intangled with the world, that hee could not possibly mount up so high’:\(^{111}\)

CLAUDIUS  
My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.

(97-8)

Unlike Herbert in ‘Prayer I’, here we will witness no ‘soul in paraphrase’, no ‘heart in pilgrimage’ (3). Nothing understood.

Claudius’ struggle here is symptomatic of a play that is repeatedly subject to ‘twofold force’, where every ‘exten[sion]’ is met with ‘contract[ion]’ (\(AW, \text{V.iii.} 50\)). Indeed, to explore the play’s language of flight and departure is to discover a concurrent impulse in the opposite direction. Thus, while an ecstatic subject is, as we have seen, one who journeys out and returns home, the inverse is true for Hamlet who, having come home to Elsinore, is denied outgoing:

CLAUDIUS  
For your intent
In going back to school in Wittenberg
It is most retrograde to our desire,
And we beseech you bend you to remain
Here in the cheer and comfort of our eye,
Our chiefest courtier, cousin, and our son.


\(^{110}\) Barnabe Rich, \textit{Riche His Farewell to Militarie Profession} (London: by J. Kingston, 1585), D.iii.v. The connection between bird and soul is intensified by the early modern type which renders ‘soule’ and ‘foule’ typographically identical.

GERTRUDE    Let not thy mother lose her prayers, Hamlet.  
            I pray thee stay with us, go not to Wittenberg.

HAMLET     I shall in all my best obey you, madam.  

While Laertes’ ‘thoughts and wishes bend … toward France’ (55), Hamlet ‘bend[s] … to remain’ at home; one discussion of departure is counteracted with another of anchorage. This two-way tension of movement, of push and pull, of upward and downward motion, can be identified throughout this play that is ‘to double business bound’ (III.iii.41). The spatial dynamics of faith that were identifiable in Augustine’s Confessions and central to Herbert’s The Temple are in this sense problematized in Hamlet, where aspirations of outgoing and ascension are repeatedly tethered. What was earlier identified as the rhetoric of ecstatic tractability is here replaced with the language of ‘sore distraction’ (V.ii.207): tractable souls become a ‘distracted multitude’ (IV.iii.4) of dis-tracted subjects.112 While the tractable soul pursued a path towards the divine, the distracted subject is one who is repeatedly ‘drawn away’ (OED, ‘distract’, adj. 2) or ‘drawn in different directions’ (OED, adj. 3). Thus Hamlet ‘confess[es] he feels himself distracted’ (III.i.5) because Claudius has employed Rosencrantz and Guildenstern for precisely that purpose: ‘to draw [Hamlet] on to pleasures’; to ‘give him further edge | And drive his purpose into these delights’ or, as Hamlet sees it, to ‘drive [him] into a toil’ (II.ii.15; III.i.26-7; III.ii.339). ‘Importunate … distract’ Ophelia is similarly ‘driven into desperate terms’ by ‘the poison of deep grief’ (IV.v.2; IV.vi.27; IV.v.75). Subjected to forces beyond their control, these subjects are drawn to distraction, pulled in different directions and, ultimately, driven to fracture; ‘Poor Ophelia, divided from herself and her fair

112 See Carol Thomas Neely’s Distracted Subjects for a more comprehensive discussion of the differences between female distraction and male melancholy, real and feigned madness, pp. 50-6.
judgement’; ‘Hamlet from himself ta’en away’ (IV.v.84; V.ii.212).

But it is not only the characters that suffer such ‘sore distraction’. Like its eponymous hero, Hamlet is deeply distracted. Indeed, Simon Critchley and Jameson Webster’s assertion that ‘thought and action seem to pull against each other’ in Hamlet’s lament that ‘currents turn awry | And lose the name of action’ (III.i.86-87), is true of the play’s action more broadly.\(^{113}\) Take, for instance, Hamlet’s fable in Act III, Scene iv:

In despite of sense and secrecy
Unpeg the basket on the house’s top,
Let the birds fly and like the famous ape
To try conclusion in the basket creep
And break your own neck down.

(III.iv.190-4)

Fictions of flight—‘Let the birds fly up’—here come crashing back ‘down’ with ‘neck’ ‘break[ing]’ momentum: movement is met with equal and opposite force; action with equal and opposite reaction. These distracted force dynamics are felt throughout Hamlet. Hamlet’s letters to Ophelia are sent out and ‘redelivere[ed]’ back to him (III.i.91); Polonius’ body is dragged ‘up the stairs into the lobby’ (IV.iii.35-6) before being ultimately buried in the ground; Ophelia falls into ‘the weeping brook’ and her ‘clothes … b[ea]r her up’ in the water before eventually ‘pull[ing]’ the poor wretch … to muddy death’ (IV.vii.173-181); the Gravedigger takes skeletons out of a grave so that Ophelia’s body can be lowered in; Hamlet envisions ‘delv[ing] below’ the ‘mines’ of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in order to ‘blow them to the moon’ (III.iv.205-206); Laertes ‘leap[s] in[to]’ his sister’s ‘grave’ (VI.267) and then ‘leaps out’ (247) to grapple with Hamlet;\(^{114}\) Fortinbras arrives at port just as Hamlet leaves for England; and even that voyage, ‘ere … two days old at sea’, is subject to the play’s compulsion to pull Hamlet back to Denmark with


\(^{114}\) In this I follow the Arden Shakespeare edition, which has Laertes jump out of the grave rather than following Q1 which asserts that ‘Hamlet leapes in after Laertes’. Thompson and Taylor justify this decision by following a number of other editors ‘who argue that Hamlet cannot be the aggressor here’, pp. 428-9.
‘sudden return’ (IV. vi. 15; IV. vii. 46). Understood in these circumstances, Claudius’ frustrated ecstatic moment is not incidental, but is typical of a play that is constantly being pulled in two directions.

‘Like a man to double business bound’, the play’s moments of pause and stasis are born out of the tension between these competing forces: ‘I stand in pause’ is as a necessary, perhaps the only, response to this duel momentum. Hamlet’s suicidal contemplation ‘must give us pause’, for instance, because it pulls in opposite directions; one can either ‘suffer | The slings and arrows’ and ‘the sea of troubles’—that is, remain at home and subject to agonising external force—or rather depart, ‘shuffle … off this mortal coil’, and explore ‘that undiscovered country from whose bourne | No traveller returns’ (III. i. 67; 57; 58; 66; 78-9). Ultimately, for Hamlet, it is ‘conscience’ that weighs him down, denies him flight, and ‘makes [him] rather bear those ills we have than fly to others we know not of’ (80-1). Once again the fiction of ascension is tethered, and the subject stands in pause. But moments of pause can also catch characters off guard. We hear, for instance, the ‘passionate speech’ of ‘Pyrrhus [who] at Priam drives’, ‘his sword … declining on [his] milky head’, but whose action is momentarily suspended as his weapon ‘seemed i’th air to stick’ above his enemy’s head (II. ii. 369; 410; 415-7). ‘Pyrrhus’ pause’ (425) is of course later mirrored as Hamlet hesitantly stands, sword drawn, above Claudius seemingly ‘a-praying’ (III. iii. 73):

Now might I do it. But now ’a is a-praying
And now I’ll do it [Draws sword.]—and so ’a goes to heaven,
And so am I revenged!
… And am I then revenged
To take him in the purging of his soul
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
No.  [Sheathes sword.]  (73-87)

‘Now … now … now … No’: as Hamlet fails to grasp the moment of action, action is suspended and thought drawn out. For fourteen lines Hamlet ‘stand[s] in pause’ as his
conscience pulls him in opposite directions; to kill Claudius now ‘would be too kind, from one point of view, and too cruel on the other’, as Lacan has it.\footnote{Jacques Lacan, ‘Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in Hamlet’, trans. James Hulbert, ed. J. A. Miller, Yale French Studies, 55-6 (1977), 11-52 (18).} Thought, in other words, distracts action and throws it off course. If Hamlet’s pause here echoes Pyrrhus’, then so too does it suffer from the play’s distracted force dynamics; the ‘twofold force’ operating here is not only a battle of Hamlet’s conscience, but also reflects the play’s impulse to match fall with flight, aspiration with anchorage: Hamlet must raise his sword ‘up’ where Pyrrhus’ let his fall down. ‘[Draws sword.] … [Sheaths sword.]’: the interim, here as elsewhere, is Hamlet’s, because Hamlet is the ultimate interim; as Francis Barker has observed, Hamlet exists either in delay or in wait.\footnote{Francis Barker, The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 36.} Hamlet, in other words, exists in pause, in the interim, waiting for the right time to act or for action to find him instead. But Hamlet not only occupies the interim—from the Ghost’s urging him to ‘step between [Gertrude] and her fighting soul’ (III.iv.109) to Claudius’ attempt to ‘inter him’ (IV.v.84)—but embodies it: born on ‘that very day’ that ‘our last King Hamlet overcame Fortinbras’ (VI.139; 135-6), and dying just three lines before young Fortinbras enters to ‘embrace [his] fortune’ (Vii.372), Hamlet’s life spans the interim between epochs, between one Fortinbras and another. The interim is his: he is the interim.

Caught in the pause, these are subjects made restless by ecstasy. ‘My words fly up, my thoughts remain below’: familiar with the narrative of ascension, Claudius desires to throw himself out, to send his soul upwards, but is forced to ‘remain below’, to stay ‘a-down a-down’, ‘never departed more’ (IV.v.165; 55). This is, as this study will explore in more detail, indicative of Shakespeare’s interest in and frustrations with the ecstatic model more broadly: while early modern narratives of ecstasy tend to ‘fly up’ into divine contemplation, representations of ecstasy in Shakespeare stubbornly ‘remain below’. The
tension that can be felt in Claudius’ moments of stasis, where ecstatic ascension is
unavailable, is therefore a tension of movement that can be identified throughout the play
at large. But it is also a tension reflective of Shakespeare’s theological interim; just as
Hamlet might be seen as occupying an interim between epochs, Hamlet can be read in
light of Shakespeare’s position between theological eras. In early modern England, the
force dynamics of faith were keenly felt; by 1601, the year Shakespeare wrote Hamlet, the
country had experienced at least four changes of state sanctioned religion in just over
seventy years (since 1530), ‘from traditional Catholicism, to the various versions of
Henrican reform, to Protestantism under Edward VI, back to Papalist Catholicism under
Mary, and now back to Protestantism again’ under Elizabeth I. In this, Hamlet might
be understood a product of what Stephen Greenblatt terms ‘the fifty-year effect’:

A time in the wake of the great, charismatic ideological struggle in which the
revolutionary generation that made the decisive break with the past is all dying
out and the survivors hear only hypocrisy in the sermons and look back with
longing on the world they have lost.

This is a (largely) Protestant England, in other words, haunted by its Catholic past, a push
and pull between theologies that has been richly explored through examinations of
Hamlet’s treatment of purgatory. On this matter, Greenblatt is struck by ‘how much
evidence on all sides there is in play’ as to whether the Ghost of Hamlet Senior, occupying
a terrifying interim between life and death, conforms to Protestant or Catholic models.
The play, read in these terms, situates itself very much between the two. But this ‘issue is
not’, continues Greenblatt, ‘simply random inconsistency’:

There is, rather, a pervasive pattern, a deliberate forcing together of radically

119 While Catholic England ceased at the ascension of Elizabeth I, ‘many English people
continued Catholic’, as Shell notes: ‘Read onto the affairs at the time, the Catholic references in
Hamlet have the effect of first stifling, then artificially reanimating, the lively presence of
Catholicism in England of which Shakespeare must have been aware throughout his working life’, p. 116.
incompatible accounts of almost everything that matters in Hamlet. … The opposing positions challenge each other, clashing and sending shock waves through the play.\textsuperscript{120}

In other words, Hamlet is theologically ‘to double business bound’, caught between Catholic and Protestant models. In a play that, as we have seen, dramatizes the failure to ascend, to lift off, to break through, to move on, this is perhaps ultimately reflective of a theological tension that, pulled in both directions, leaves Shakespeare standing in pause.

While the first section of this chapter established the dynamics of ecstasy through metaphors of journey and pilgrimage, such journeys are postponed and denied in Hamlet. Indeed, the play is uninterested in the moment of arrival: religious ascension is weighed down by heavy thoughts, letters are returned to sender, and journeys to ‘the undiscovered country’ (III.i.78), as to England, are suspended or cut short. Like the ghost of his father, Hamlet is caught up in the play’s ‘corrupted currents’, denied peregrination and instead contained in Denmark. Instead, as I have suggested, Shakespeare situates his most famous ecstatic subject—variously diagnosed as experiencing the ‘very ecstasy of love’ (II.i.99), being ‘blasted with ecstasy’ (III.i.161), or suffering the ‘coinage of the brain’ that ‘ecstasy | Is very cunning in’ (III.iv.36-7)—firmly in the interim. It is here, I will demonstrate, that Shakespeare locates the potential of ecstasy.

\textsuperscript{120} Greenblatt, Hamlet in Purgatory, p. 240.
ii) BOTTOM’S DREAM: ‘MECHANICAL ENTHUSIASM’ AND THE MECHANICS OF ECSTASY IN A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM

The Apostle S. Paul in that great Extasy, which he suffred, when being rapt up into Paradise, did heare those secret words, which were not lawfull to speake to Man, was not as then Blessed, and yet he was so absorpt in God, as that be obserued not, whether he was in Body, or out of Body. How great then shall that most happy Union of a Soule with God be, & how shall that Soule (which shalbe one spirit with God) be even drowned as it were, in seas of such inexplicable sweetenesse?121

Rapt up to paradise in ‘that great Extasy’, St. Paul glimpses unspeakable wonders in his ascent to the third heaven: ‘The eye hath not seen, and the ear hath not heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him’ (I Corinthians, 2:9). This is a keynote case of the soul being caught outside of, and away from, the body: of being, as English clergyman Martin Fotherby has it, ‘ravished and transported with … heavenly contemplation’ and carried ‘cleane out of himself’ in ‘spirituall extasie’.122 As Screech has observed, this Pauline verse was ‘a standard commonplace to cite in ecstatic contexts’: ‘merely to allude to it was enough to evoke association with ecstasies, visions and revelations’.123 It is with this in mind that the remainder of this chapter turns to consider what is at stake in Shakespeare’s allusion to this ecstatic commonplace in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, a play that is, as Alison Shell notes in her study of Shakespeare and Religion, ‘on one level the most un-Christian of plays’.124 While Shakespeare’s writing does not concede to a Christian model of ecstasy, I will consider the extent to which the play appropriates the narrative framework

123 Screech, Montaigne and Melancholy, p. 11.
124 Shell, p. 15. ‘Any study of Shakespeare and religion’, Shell notes, ‘must confront a paradox. Shakespeare’s writing has been seen both as profoundly religious, giving everyday human life a sacramental quality, and as profoundly secular, foreshadowing the kind of humanism that sees no necessity for God’, p. 2.
established throughout this chapter. This is not ecstasy denied, as it was in *Hamlet*: this is rather ecstasy reclaimed.

‘I have had a most rare vision’, announces Bottom as he awakes from his dream:

I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no man can tell what. Methought I was, and methought I had—but man is a patched fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not seen, the ear of man hath not heard, the hand of man hath not been, nor his tongue conceived, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. It shall be called ‘Bottom’s Dream’, because it hath no bottom...

(*MND*, IV.i.201-12)

That Bottom’s failure to articulate his ‘bottomless’ dream echoes St. Paul’s account of his ecstasy in I Corinthians 2:9 has not gone unnoticed in criticism of the play. Attention to the passage highlights that in the Geneva Bible (1557)—the edition scholars tend to agree Shakespeare ‘refers most to’ and ‘may well have owned a copy’ of—the final phrase of Paul’s account reads ‘yea, the bottom of Goddes secretes’: a phrase which is, for Thomas B. Stroup, the source for the name of Shakespeare’s ‘Nick Bottom, the weaver’ (I.ii.16).125

As Hassel notes, Shakespeare’s audience, ‘probably the best theologically trained audience in the history of Christendom, would have heard the Pauline allusion, and most of them would have grasped its crucial implications.’126 ‘Even Bottom’, Hassel continues, ‘knew most of the words’.127 Bottom is, after all, to borrow Puck’s epithet, one of the play’s ‘rude mechanicals’ (III.ii.9), a term which, as Patricia Parker highlights, ‘designated

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126 Rudolph Chris Hassel, Jr., *Faith and Folly in Shakespeare’s Romantic Comedies* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1980), p. 57. It perhaps corroborates the view of this chapter that Hassel conducts such a comprehensive study on this ecstatic commonplace in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* but decides, as noted above, not to include ecstasy in his *Shakespeare’s Religious Language: A Dictionary.*

… the practical as opposed to the contemplative’.  

Parker observes that references to the mechanicals are ‘most often the embodiment of a distinct class voice, tied to the attempt to “singulate” or distinguish high from low’. Hassel’s note that even Bottom could recite scripture therefore seems to carry some weight, and Parker herself considers Shakespeare’s decision to give Bottom these lines (rather than the play’s Athenian ruler) as indicative of ‘this play’s preposterous unsettling of hierarchy’; ‘if the mechanical in the period was distinguished from the contemplative’, it is only fitting that ‘the mechanical Bottom (not the ruler Theseus)’ should recall ‘the scriptural instance par excellence of visionary experience’. In short, that the ‘unlettered’ Bottom—himself at the bottom of the play’s social hierarchy—should recall a vision in (somewhat scrambled) Pauline terms is, for these critics, symptomatic of the play’s subversive impulses.

But to situate Shakespeare’s weaver alongside his mechanical contemporaries outside of the play productively unsettles Parker’s assertion that the period distinguished ‘the mechanical … from the contemplative’, for it suggests the extent to which such a blurring of social distinctions extends beyond Shakespeare’s dramatic vision for Dream. In 1586, for instance, shoemaker John White claimed to be John the Baptist, and in 1636, two weavers, John Bull and Richard Farnham, claimed to be divine prophets. These individuals, often dismissed as ‘brainsick’ or ‘frantic’, offered a foretaste of the

129 Parker, p. 86.
130 Parker, p. 86.
131 Parker, p. 98.
enthusiastic activities that would be more common in the Civil War period.\textsuperscript{132} Much later, in a pamphlet on *The Sufficiencie of the Spirits of Teaching without Humane Learning* (1640), Samuel How, cobbler and pastor of a separatist church in pre-war London, condemns the notion that ‘knowledge of arts, sciences, diverse tongues, [and] much reading’ enhances a person’s ability ‘to understand the mind of God in his word’.\textsuperscript{133} For How, as for early Quakerist George Fox, ‘being bred at Oxford or Cambridge, was not enough to fit and qualifie Men to be Ministers of Christ’.\textsuperscript{134} As Fox writes in his journal in early 1646, this was a notion that ‘the Lord opened unto [him]’ while walking alone ‘in a field on a first-day morning’; one that he initially notes having ‘stranged at’ given that it went against the ‘common belief of the people’.\textsuperscript{135} Thus instead of going ‘to hear the priest’, Fox began to instead ‘get into the orchard, or the fields, with [his] Bible, by [him]self’:

I saw that being bred at Oxford or Cambridge, did not qualify or fit a man to be a minister of Christ; and what then should I follow such for? So neither of them, nor any of the Dissenting people, could I join with; but was a stranger to all, relying wholly upon the Lord Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{136}

An Egalitarian notion that, at first, Fox ‘stranged at’, therefore, was one that would ultimately make him ‘a stranger to all’; this was a moment of revelation that brought with it not only a move away from an established religious order and the practices he once upheld, but also from society. With ecstatic revelation it seems, comes social disruption. In this, How and Fox figure as later examples of ‘Mechanick Enthusiasts’: subjects who challenged the notion that access to and understanding of the word of God belonged solely to the learned elite. While this stance was a radical one, How and Fox were by no

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\textsuperscript{133} Samuel How, *The Sufficiencie of the Spirits of Teaching Without Humane Learning* (Amsterdam: s.n., 1640), sig. B:
\textsuperscript{135} Fox, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{136} Fox, p. 5.
\end{flushright}
means alone in their outlooks. In his introduction to his *Treatise on Enthusiasme*, Anglican scholar and divine Meric Casaubon (1599-1671) promises (but would ultimately fail to write) a chapter on ‘Mechanical Enthusiasme’ as the ‘eighth and last species’ in his comprehensive study. While ‘neither Plato nor Plutarch mention any such’, Casaubon justifies this inclusion on the grounds that ‘others do expressly’, and that ‘there is ground enough in the nature of the thing, to give it a particular head and consideration’. Mechanical Enthusiasm was growing increasingly popular, and even a London goldsmith such as Thomas Tany (1608-1659) would come to observe how his profession became symbolic of a prophetic status, adopting what ought to by now be the familiar language of devout ductility:

I was and am the Goldsmith, and God hath made me the Refiners fire, to refine Gold from the dross, which is but thus much, to separate ye Priests from your trade of lies.

‘To see a godly Christian weaver, to pray, to read, to expound a chapter, repeat a Sermon, or Discourse of the Scriptures privately in his owne house, to his owne family and his Christian Neighbours’ was, therefore, an increasingly common occurrence in early modern England. No longer was ‘Doctrine … knowne … onely of them that are Doctors of the Church, and the Maisters of the people’, but now also ‘even of the Tailors, and Smithes, and Weavers, and of all Artificiers’. It is in this climate that figures such as Tom Snout, Robert Starveling, and Nick Bottom (a tinker, tailor, and weaver respectively) might be counted as early representations of those ‘Poor sleight Fellows’ whose

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137 Casaubon in fact only gets so far as to discuss ‘Precatory Enthusiasme’, the sixth of eight species of enthusiasm that his study promises to discuss. Chapter Four of this study engages more extensively with Casaubon’s *Treatise* in light of his discussions of ‘Enthusiasme proceeding from naturall causes’, p. 80.

138 Casaubon, p. 18.


141 Prynne, p. 310.
spiritualist ideas and beliefs John Everand (1584-1641)—who held a doctorate in divinity—would explicitly seek to dismiss in his radical reformation against ‘Tinkers, Cobblers, Weavers’.142 This is a climate unwilling to tolerate the dreams and ecstatic aspirations of mechanical enthusiasts.

Recounting his dream in Pauline terms, Bottom transgresses the socio-theological boundaries demarcating ‘mechanical’ and ‘contemplative’; boundaries which, as I have suggested, were to come under threat outside of the play text as much as they do within it. That Bottom mangles ecstatic commonplace is, for a number of critics, in keeping with Shakespeare’s comic vision for Dream; this is a moment that is for Screech ‘complex jesting’, and for Hassel one of ‘unmistakable parody’.143 Bottom’s jumbled rhetoric is, in this, seen to be indicative of the play’s wider concerns; ‘his malapropisms are’, as Marjorie Garber suggests, ‘related to the important theme of transformation’.144 ‘The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, nor his tongue conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was’: this is the closest that any Shakespearean character—mechanical, contemplative, or otherwise—will come to articulating the theological ecstatic experience as it has been understood thus far in this study. Yet this is a speech that makes explicit its failure to articulate that experience: ecstasy, even in its most recognised and quoted form, is denied apt expression. It is here, in this inarticulate interim, that Shakespeare will exhibit what it means to be truly beside oneself; it is here that Shakespeare, who, as Philip Davis has observed ‘loves … working in those charged and saturated spaces in between’, will adopt an ecstatic interim to explore ‘the form of things unknown’ (V.i.15).145

143 Screech, Montaigne and Melancholy, p. 11; Hassel, Faith and Folly, p. 53.
‘When my cue comes, call me, and I will answer. My next is “most fair Pyramus”’ (IV.i.198-199): waking from his ‘dream’, Bottom picks up precisely where he left off prior to his ‘translat[ion]’ in III.i:

QUINCE Pryamus, enter! Your cue is past; it is ‘never tire’.

FLUTE Oh, [as Thisbe] ‘As true as truest horse that yet would never tire’.

[Enter … Bottom with the ass head on.]

(III.i.89-90 s.d.)

Since this moment in Act III, Scene i, Bottom has stood ‘in pause’, ‘entered in a br[e]ake’ (III.ii.15), and endured a dispersal of self that is recoverable only at the point of his awakening; Bottom awakes in media res, as it were, to debate the cue he missed one act prior. In this Bottom seemingly succeeds where Claudius will fail, for Bottom’s narrative, to a large extent, takes place in an ecstatic interim where he ‘stand[s] in pause’; Shakespeare is willing to allow Bottom the ecstatic peregrination that he denies Claudius. Having been thrown out of himself—made to be beside himself for an entire act of the play—Bottom now returns home to self with inexplicable ease, re-collects himself with little recollection of having lost himself in the first place. All interactions in between, including those with his mechanical comrades, have seemingly fallen into the haze of the somnambulant adventures of ‘Bottom’s dream’ that reside beyond the capacity of utterance. And yet while Bottom may not be able to articulate ecstasy in the Pauline terms he grasps after, in his claims towards an experience ‘past the wit of man to say’, that ‘no man can tell’, that he will not ‘offer to say’, he perhaps comes closer than it might first appear. For ‘it is’, as Puritan author Robert Crofts has it, ‘impossible to expresse the pleasures of the heavenly soule’: ‘it’s Extasies and Ravishments cannot bee uttered’.146 Translating Teresa’s Flaming Heart into English, Tobie Matthew similarly notes that ‘it is hard, for anie Penn, to express’ these experiences, an anxiety that repeatedly punctuates Teresa’s accounts of rapture or vision of the divine: ‘I know not, how to expresse it … I

neither can, nor know, how to expresse … I am not able, by anie means, to expresse’. ¹⁴⁷

Indeed, early modern accounts of Paul’s rapture to the third heaven are repeatedly punctuated by assertions of ‘unspeakable mysteries’, ‘inexplicable sweetnesse’, and ‘unexpressible words … which is was not possible for him to utter, and relate to others’. ¹⁴⁸

Understood in these terms, Bottom’s ‘expound[ing]’ of his dream is less a failed attempt at articulating the ecstatic experience than the keynote claim of a subject who has suffered ecstasy: Bottom is symptomatic of the ecstatic subject for whom words will always fail. ‘I have had a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was’: ecstasy, an experience that takes the subject to the limits of self, can only ever seek expression at the limits of utterance.¹⁴⁹

‘I only have words to describe it;’ asserts Clément’s syncopic subject, ‘[and] I will tell you that they are inadequate’.¹⁵⁰ Or, as Moria notes at the close to Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly*:

when ravished so in the sprite, or being in a trance, they do speak certain things not hanging one with another, nor after any earthly facion, but rather do put forth a voice they wote never what, much less to be understood of others … it is certain that they are wholly distraught and rapt out of themselves. In sort that when a little after they come again to their former wits (Godly men in a kind of trance) they deny plainly they wote where they became, or whether they were than in their bodies, or out of their bodies, waking or sleeping: remembering also as little, either what they heard, saw, said, or did than, saying as it were through a cloud, or by a dream.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ *The Flaming Heart*, sig. *5r*; p. 140; 223; 387. ‘Being once so in Prayer’, she writes, ‘the delight, and gust, which I felt within my self was so great … that my Spirit grew to be so in Rapt; and so, as I know not, how to expresse it’, p. 637.


¹⁵⁰ Clément, p. 232.

¹⁵¹ Erasmus, *The Praise of Folie*, trans. Sir Thomas Chaloner (London: by Thomas Berthelet, 1549), sig. T.iii»–v. By this, Erasmus continues, ‘they know certainly, that whiles their mindes so roved and wandred, they were most happy and blisfull … this is but a certaine smacke or thinne taste of their blisse to come’ (n.b. some spelling has been edited to aid scansion).
‘Wholly distraught and rapt out of them selves’, these are similarly the terms in which the lovers will express their ‘dream’ a ‘little after’ they have ‘come again to their former wits’:

These things seems small and undistinguishable,
Like far-off mountains turnèd into clouds.

(IV.i.186-7)

‘Half sleeping, half waking’ (146), the lovers, now neatly coupled up, remember the events that have passed only ‘as it were through a cloud, or by a dream’; everything is, like the overgrown mazes of the moonlit wood, ‘undistinguishable’ (II.i.100). Leaving the maze behind, the couples can do little else but speak ‘amazedly’ (145); as the lovers, to borrow Ruth Nevo’s term ‘recuperate, literally, from their “trip”’, they struggle to bring things into focus—‘me thinks I see … with parted eye, | When everything seems double’—and through to articulation: ‘I cannot truly say how I came here’ (IV.i.147).152

This erotic revelry is something that Shakespeare’s characters cannot, or will not, articulate: as Jan Kott has it, ‘all are ashamed in the morning’.153 If the move from city to forest is understood as one of liberation, the return home is a return to constraint; while the moonlit wood facilitated erotic madness—an ecstasy that situates itself somewhere between the Bacchic ‘woodness’ and Platonic mania of the previous chapter—the return of daylight, to Athens, to Christian society, seems to bring with it some degree of censorship.154 Lysander, for instance, ‘cannot truly say’ what happened

154 These are the terms in which Anca Vlasopolos considers ‘The Ritual of Midsummer’ in Dream: Shakespeare’s use of the pagan and Christian aspects of Midsummer serves as a framework for his comedy. The lovers, whose function is that of generation, flee from the constraints of the city into the woods, where they act out the pagan rite of fertility amid darkness, confusion, and the manipulations of those forces which rule vegetative nature. They emerge, their conflicts resolved, into the light of Christian reason and accept the restraint of monogamy so as to effect their integrations into the social order, and more, importantly, to ensure their salvation—‘The Ritual of Midsummer: A Pattern for A Midsummer Night’s Dream’, RQ, 31 (1978), 21-9 (29).
in the woods ‘as yet’; the lovers will ‘recount [their] dreams’ to one another, and will later
tell ‘all the story of the night’ to Theseus and Hippolyta with ‘great constancy’, but this
cannot be given voice in the text. And even then, once all has been relayed, these tales
remain beyond belief, ‘more strange than true’, as Theseus has it (VI.2). Titania, too, is
denied an answer as to ‘how came these things to pass’ (IV.i.77) until she and Oberon
depart the stage ‘in … flight’ (98). Indeed, Bottom, though unable to fully recount his
dream after he has woken, seemingly plans to eventually divulge all and ‘get Peter Quince
to write a ballad of this dream’ (IV.i.211): ‘I am to discourse wonders’, he announces to
the company, but ‘if I tell you, I am no true Athenian’ (IV.ii.26-7). Athens is seemingly no
place for this kind of ecstatic displacement, a society that is not willing to hear or give
voice to these dreams.

While Bottom’s dream highlights that the subject’s capacity to articulate ecstasy
is limited, it also demonstrates the extent to which this commonplace ecstatic utterance
is limiting in turn. After all, these carnal pleasures are precisely those that are inarticulable
by St. Paul: ‘The body is not for fornication, but for the Lord’ (I Corinthians, 6:13). ‘Ever
since St. Paul’, observe Anthony Kosnick et al. in their study of sexuality in Catholic
thought:

Abstinence from sexual pleasure has been seen as an anticipation of that future
fulfilment, and passionate desire for pleasure as contrary to holiness. As a result,
Christian tradition and spirituality have tended to see a certain incompatibility
between sexual pleasure and sanctity. Living a sex life somehow does not seem to
fit into living the divine life fully.\footnote{Anthony Kosnik, William Carroll, Agnes Cunningham, Ronald Modras, and James Schulte, \textit{Human Sexuality: New Directions in American Catholic Thought} (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), p. 29.}

As Foucault writes, summarizing Saint Augustine’s experiences of involuntary arousal:
‘Sex in erection is the image of man revolted against God’.\footnote{Cit. Johnathan Goldberg, \textit{The Seeds of Things: Theorizing Sexuality and Materiality in Renaissance Representations} (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 75.} Sexual desire should be
controlled, fornication forbade. This is certainly contrary to what Titania has in mind for
Bottom as she desires ‘to have my love to bed, and to arise’ (III.i.162).\textsuperscript{157} As Titania introduces Bottom to what Kott has considered ‘the dark sphere of sex where … there is only infatuation and liberation’, the play displays the darker undercurrents of the desire for union.\textsuperscript{158} For giving in to desire can, as Bottom and Titania will discover, force us beyond ourselves—‘thy fair virtue’s force perforce doth move me’ (133)—and quite literally throw us off track. ‘Out of this wood do not desire to go’, Titania instructs Bottom as he contemplates how ‘to get out of this wood’. ‘Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no; ‘lead him to my bower’ (142-4; 186)’: an obedient, tractable subject, Bottom is dis-tracted and thrown off course by Titania’s desire.

Thus if Bottom fails to correctly appropriate a theological narrative of ecstasy, it is because the narrative in turn fails him; Bottom’s malapropisms are less a failure to articulate his ecstatic experience than a struggle towards articulation that is hindered by the only available rhetoric. Bottom’s experience, in other words, eludes a Christian narrative, because this was not a Christian experience; his ‘vision has not been of Christian grace’, as Peter Holland notes, ‘but of a night with an Ovidian fairy-queen’.\textsuperscript{159} Bottom’s dream cannot be relayed in terms of divine ecstasy, because the experience of divine union has been replaced with sexual rapture.\textsuperscript{160} Indeed, it is the prospect of lifelong celibacy that sees ‘fair Hermia’s flight’ from Athens (I.i.246):

\begin{quote}
Either to die the death, or to abjure 
For ever the society of men. 
Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires, 
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{158} Kott, p. 119.

\textsuperscript{159} Peter Holland, p. 84.

\textsuperscript{160} I use ‘rapture’ here to signal that Bottom’s encounter with Titania has been variously read as a scene of sexual bliss and of rape (which shares with rapture the latinate root raptura, to carry away by force). For discussions of the former, see Louis Adrian Montrose, “‘Shaping Fantasies’: Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture’, Representations, 2 (1983), 61-94; for the latter, see Kott (1998).
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,
You can endure the livery of a nun,
For aye to be in shady cloister mewed,
To live a barren sister all your life,
Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.

(65-73)

On this fate ‘the law of Athens’ (119) is, much like Hermia's father, inflexible, ‘by no means … extenuate’ (120), and so the lovers must instead ‘steal forth’ the ‘father’s house’ (164), the city confines, ‘the sharp Athenian law’ (162), to a place where tenderness is allowed: where lovers are able to ‘tender … affection’ and discover what it means to have such affection tendered back: ‘I am such a tender ass’ (III.ii.230; IV.i.25). Refusing to retreat into ‘the austerity of a single life’ (I.i.90), to ‘relent’ and ‘yield’ to a life of ‘single blessedness’ (I.i.91; 78), Hermia realises that she must, quite literally, become more outgoing: ‘Lysander and myself will fly this place’ (I.i.203). Because, as the subjects of this chapter would concur, union is only available to those willing to risk departure, willing to risk vulnerability; ‘one is’, in Judith Butler’s terms, ‘compelled and comported outside oneself’ and ‘finds that the only way to know oneself’ is through a mediation that takes place outside of oneself, exterior to oneself.” Like its devout counterpart in the first section of this chapter, the loving subject is attracted to this rhetoric of tractability, willing to undo itself, to be undone by others, and to endure what Kuzner and Georges Bataille would agree as being ‘the experience of ecstasy, of being shattered through and through’. This is the kind of vulnerable exposure that ecstasy demands.

To deliver his characters from a world that is ‘by no means … extenuate[d]’, we

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161 Eric Langley reminds us that ‘extenuate’ (from tenuis, thin) belongs to the tender lexicon; sharing the ‘Proto-Indo-European root ten- (to stretch) with tendere, to ‘extenuate’ means, amongst other related senses, to attenuate via elongation’, Shakespeare’s Contagious Sympathies, p. 232, n. 13.

162 This is the kind of ‘outgoing subject’ that Rudolphe Gasché identifies in Of Minimal Things, p. 8.


have seen how Shakespeare necessarily provides extenuating circumstances. But while escaping Athens is the only way to step outside of social identity, such radical action is not without cost. As they leave the city, the quartet of lovers enter into a period of strange amazement, wandering the ‘quaint mazes’ (II.i.99) of a labyrinthine wood where they are estranged both from themselves—‘am not I Hermia?’—and from each other: ‘are you not Lysander?’ (III.ii.273). Indeed, this is a play that co-opts the Bacchic capacity for transformation in a localized space, for a confined period of time, using its energies but keeping them in check. As we saw in Hamlet, characters in Dream repeatedly find themselves ‘distracted’ (31), ‘wood within this wood’ as Demetrius puts it (II.i.192), as they are drawn and diverted ‘through the forest’ (72) by powers beyond their control: be it overpowering affection—‘you draw me’, laments Helena to Demetrius, ‘[a]nd I … have no power [but] to follow you’ (195; 198)—or affected momentum:

   Up and down, up and down,
   I will lead them up and down.
   I am feared in field and town.
   Goblin, lead them up and down.

(III.ii.396-9)

Here ‘nature shows art’ (II.ii.110), and the force dynamics that were identifiable in Hamlet are transparently stage managed. Titania ‘dote[s] on [Bottom] in extremity’ (III.ii.3), for example, because she is—like Bottom, like the lovers—put into extremis. ‘Steal me a while from mine own company’ (III.ii.436): lost in the maze, these characters learn what it truly means to be beside themselves. After all, as Kristeva notes, and Titania would perhaps attest, ‘being alienated from myself, as painful as that may be, provides me with that

165 Northrop Frye’s ‘green world’ theory of Shakespearean comedy similarly stresses the transformative potential of the journeying. As he writes of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, identifying an ‘embryonic form of the fairy world in’ of Dream: ‘the action of the comedy begins in a world represented as a normal world, moves into the green world, goes into a metamorphosis there in which the comic resolution is achieved, and returns to the normal world’—Northrop Frye’s Writings on Shakespeare and the Renaissance, ed. Troni Y. Grande and Garry Sherbert (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), pp. 9-10
exquisite distance within which perverse pleasure begins’.  

But this is, as Holland notes, ‘a maze which proves beneficial to the individuals who tread its paths’: ‘all shall be well’, as Puck tells us (III.ii.464). As they wake from their ‘long and tedious night’ (III.ii.431), the ‘fair lovers … are fortunately met’ (IV.i.176), leaving the ‘mazèd world’ (II.i.113) to find that discord has been translated into ‘gentle concord’ (IV.i.142), enmity into ‘new amity’ (86), and that, in these extenuating circumstances, the ‘law’ that previously could not be ‘extenuate[d]’ can now be ‘extremely stretchd’ (VI.80):

THESEUS Egeus, I will overbear your will, For in the temple by and by with us These couples shall be eternally knit. (178-80)

Soon to be ‘eternally knit’ in marriage, these ‘fair lovers’ have risked self-loss and travelled through to a mutually incorporate identity; they have, to borrow Donne’s terms, ‘go[ne] out’, ‘advanced their state’, and returned home to reformed selves: ‘my heart’ declares Demetrius, is ‘home returned, there to remain’ (III.ii.171-3). In this Shakespeare’s characters enact a literal model of the homecoming to which the ecstatic subject aspires; one where those who risk out-going are ‘fortunately met’ and welcomed home: ‘Away with us to Athens’ (IV.i.183). ‘I am amazed’ (III.ii.344): ecstasy is ‘amazing’, and, as those ‘wand’ring in the wood’ (II.i.41) variously demonstrate, as indeed Petrarch found on his ascent of Mount Ventoux, that experience can be at once both dizzyingly agonising and joyously blissful.

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167 Holland, p. 77.
168 This is of course an overtly positive about Demetrius’ homecoming and return to his ‘natural taste’. For an alternative reading, see Alison Shell, ‘Delusion in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’, in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Religion*, ed. David Loewenstein and Michael Witmore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 81-95.
While Shakespeare might not be willing to engage fully with a theologically inflected narrative of transcendence, of aspirational ascension, of outgoing and homecoming, he is willing to bring those issues in to play in a way that ‘remain[s] below’. While the ‘corrupted currents’ (III.iii.57) of *Hamlet* deny Claudius his wish to throw himself out towards the divine, the characters in *Dream* are free to undergo a peregrination that will take them beside themselves and return them safely home. As the first two sections of this chapter brought into focus, such metaphors of movement and journeying were frequently used to articulate union with the divine in commonplace religious narratives of ecstasy, and in the early modern devotional works of poets such as Herbet, Donne, and Crawshaw. In these models, ecstasy is presented as an experience which could, temporarily, enable the devout subject both to transgress the boundaries and negotiate the distance between self and the divine other. Yet, as we have seen, rather than engaging explicitly with narratives of religious ecstasy, Shakespeare, like Donne, instead employs ecstasy as narrative, turning devotional pathways into the journeys of the subject. What this chapter has established, therefore, is Shakespeare’s interest in secular alternatives to the commonplace models of religious ecstasis. Likening the journey that was central to this chapter to the experience of love that is central to the next, Clément captures this succinctly: ‘no one returns the same as when he left: he will not come back as he was at the beginning, he will never be the same’. Here we have observed subjects necessarily ‘extended through and through … in the coming-and-going into the world’, subjects willing to ‘alienate [them]selves through desire’, for, as Jean Starobinski suggests, following Montaigne, ‘I have no identity unless I am willing to accept this alienation’.  

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169 Clément, p. 128.

170 Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, p. 119; Starobinski, p. 128.
As it moves to consider the ecstasy of desire, this study will now consider just how alienating that experience can be.
CHAPTER THREE

Shakespeare’s Little Deaths:
The Erotic Ecstatic

Great love is never without some kind of extasie.¹

A little death it is, which up doth send
Our soules to heaven, before we make our end.²

‘Love’s not Time’s fool’, asserts the speaker of Shakespeare’s ‘marriage sonnet’.³ Despite the risk of being undermined by the sonnets which surround it—which James Schiffer recognises as ‘mak[ing] clear that … permanence cannot be long sustained in an ever-changing relationship in a highly mutable world’—`Sonnet 116’ seeks to carve out a moment of surety and confidence ‘against time and alteration’.⁴ In this moment of pause, the speaker no longer ‘fear[s] … Time’s tyranny’ that ‘creeps in ’twixt vows’ and is endlessly ‘alt’ring things’ (`Sonnet 115’, 6; 8), but instead celebrates love’s triumph over time and, accordingly, its unalterable fixity:

Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no, it is an ever-fixèd mark
That looks on tempests and is never shaken.

(`Sonnet 116’, 2-6)

Read optimistically, the sonnet shows Shakespeare at least acknowledging the ideal of love as stable, fixed, unmoving, and unchanging; enumerating its sublime qualities, love is here depicted as an emotion that ‘alters not’ with the passing of time, that remains

‘ever-fixèd’ and ‘is never shaken’. But, as this chapter will make clear, the same cannot—and indeed should not—be said of those who experience it; to be ‘shaken’ is, I will suggest, an unavoidable risk for the subject who desires to cross the vibrative interim between self and beloved. The following discussion will explore how love and desire take the subject outside of themselves, offering momentary relief from the inexorable passage of time. While ‘Sonnet 116’ depicts love as unchanging, this chapter considers the ways that love affects temporal change in affectionate subjects.

Indeed, while Love might not be Time’s fool, the foolish lover’s experience of time is far from ‘fixèd’, with early modern literature repeatedly depicting the loving subject’s capacity to escape linear time and, accordingly, experience the rhythms and movements of an alternative temporality; as Rosalind has it, ‘time travels in divers paces with divers persons’ (AIIII, III.ii.282-3). ‘Nothing is more changeable than time’, Franciscan author Bartholomaeus Anglicus would concur, whose encyclopaedic work frequently reveals a keen interest in the body, disease, and treatment, ‘and therefore nothing is more perilous to the body’. With this in mind, the following chapter considers the ecstatic experiences of loving subjects in order to explore more fully Hamlet’s assertion that even the extremes of ecstasy might still be felt and measured both temporally, and physiologically:

HAMLET Extasie?
My pulse as yours doth temperately keep time,
And makes as healthful music.

(III.iv.142-3 [F1])

Evidencing his pulse in order to deny ecstasy, Hamlet here asserts his ‘healthful’ temperance: he is temperate (OED, ‘temper’, n. 3: to have ‘mental balance of composure’) because his pulse ‘keep[s] time’ (OED, ‘temper’, v. 18: to regulate a clock). An ecstatic

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5 For an alternative reading of this sonnet, see Helen Vendler, The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 488-93.


7 Both of these references are consistent with early modern usage.
subject’s pulse, he tells us, is by contrast irregular, out of time, dislocated from temporality. This is not the first time that Shakespeare suggests a link between ecstasy and pulse; in the *Comedy of Errors*, Doctor Pinch examines Antipholus of Ephesus as he ‘trembles in his ecstasy’ by taking his ‘hand’ and ‘feel[ing]’ his ‘pulse’ (IV.iv.53; 54). For scholars such as Susan Iyengar, this relationship between out-of-body experience and heart rate suggests that an ecstatic subject’s pulse ‘would beat quickly, like that of a madman in a frenzy or delirium’.8 Ecstasy, in other words, is an experience that has the pulse racing.

And yet elsewhere it seems to stop the heart altogether: ‘sometimes I am, in effect, without anie pulse at all, as my Sisters tell me … the Bodie remains apart, as if it were utterly dead’, Saint Teresa observes in her discussion of her own out of body experience.9 In his essay ‘On the Force of the Imagination’, Montaigne similarly discusses ‘reports of a Priest, whose soule was ravished into such an extasie, that for a long time the body remained voide of all respiration and sense’; ‘during this extasie’, he continues, ‘he seemed to have neither pulse nor breath’.10 The ecstatic experience can thus be understood as both a moment of fleeting intensity, and conversely an experience that could last for a sustained period of time. Where the previous chapter demonstrated how ecstasy might be read as a spatial experience, the following discussion considers the ecstatic experience in terms of temporality and pacing: to experience the ecstasy of love, I suggest, is to experience a telescoping of temporality. As Teresa and Montaigne have highlighted, ecstasy was not and should not be understood solely in terms of acceleration—where time seems to go quicker, where the pulse beats faster—for it also

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8 Iyengar, p. 115.
holds a sense of dilation, where time and pulse seem to stand still. Indeed, discussions of and by a range of early modern religious figures similarly reveal ‘Extasies’ as leaving subjects with ‘no beating of [their] pulses’, swoons where ‘the breath may be stopt [and] the pulse not beat sensibly’, trances where ‘pulses’ fall ‘dull and dead’.11 ‘In extasies and raptures’, writes Scottish clergyman Alexander Ross, ‘the body’ is ‘without sense and motions, and seems as it were dead’.12 To anticipate Chapter Four, medical discussions of ‘Phrensie … Epilepsie, [and] Convulsion’ similarly find that these states are accompanied by ‘an irregular Pulse’, identifying cases of syncope, epilepsy, and other trance states ‘where no pulse is perceptible … so that even Physicians themselves … have sometimes mistaken the Living for the Dead’.13 In moments such as these, where the subject trembles between life and ‘that undiscovered country’ (Ham., III.i.81), a ‘little death’ might not be understood simply as a sexual experience—though this sense will be explored in detail in due course—but as an experience of ecstasy.

Where the previous chapter considered ecstasy as offering a ‘time-out’ and escape, the following discussion considers the ecstatic experience as one able to both speed up and slow down the pulse of existence. Furthermore, this chapter considers the ‘little death’ as a kind of ecstatic experience, in order to demonstrate how these experiences bring subjects to the threshold between life and death, self and other: ecstasy, I suggest, is an experience that is located at these boundaries. Focusing on period medical discourses of sex, ecstasy, and notions of orgasm as a ‘little death’, the first section of this chapter

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12 Alexander Ross, *The Philosophical Touch-Stone* (London: for James Young, 1645), p. 144. Ross here contrasts the state of the body to that of the soul which ‘remains unperished, or unextinguished’.

establishes the virtues and risks of sexual expenditure. This chapter then moves to explore how moments of ‘little death’ might be considered as moments of ecstasy: where moments of ecstasis and petite mort intersect to demonstrate more fully the implications of being beside oneself. From Venus’ death-like swoon (\textit{Ven.}, 484) to Juliet’s ‘thing like death’ (\textit{Rom.}, IV.i.74), what follows considers ecstasy as both an experience of intense quickness, and one of radical pause. Suggesting how ecstasy problematizes the subject’s capacity to ‘keep time’, this chapter identifies ecstatic subjects trembling between ‘tempering extremities’ (\textit{Rom.}, 2.0.14) and distempering extremis. If ‘the self forms at the edge of desire’, as Anne Carson asserts in her study of Eros, what follows explores ecstasy as an experience that tempts subjects towards that threshold.\footnote{Anne Carson, \textit{Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 39.}
1. ‘TH’EXPENSE OF SPIRIT’: SEXUAL ECSTASY AND ANXIOUS MINGLING

Th’expense of spirit in a waste of shame  
Is lust in action, and till action, lust  
Is perjured, murd’rous, bloody, full of blame,  
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;  
Enjoyed no sooner but despièd straight,  
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,  
Past reason hated as a swallowed bait  
On purpose laid to make the taker mad:  
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so,  
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;  
A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe,  
Before, a joy proposed, behind, a dream.  
All this the world well knows yet none knows well  
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

(‘Sonnet 129’)

‘In the acte of Generation or Copulation’, writes early modern physician Helkiah Crooke, ‘the whole bodie is delighted and as it were stupified with an extasie of pleasure, or if you will, suffereth a pleasant Convulsion’. Borrowing from the Latin dēlectāre—to allure, attract, please—and dēlicēre—to entice away—‘delight’ occurs at this moment of being carried away from oneself with pleasure: the ‘extasie of pleasure’ is ‘delightful’, the body is ‘delighted’, because it is enticed away. Transported by the pleasures of sexual intercourse, trembling towards the moment of orgasm, the ecstatic subject willingly relinquishes control. This pleasurable ecstasy could be experienced by male and female bodies alike: ‘in the ecstasy of coitus’, as William Harvey notes, women experience a ‘violent shaking and dissolution and spilling of humours’, just as Aristotle had observed how ‘much delight accompanies the ejection of seed, by breaking forth of the swelling spirit, and the stiffness of Nerves’. Once again, ‘delight’ involves a sense of projection.

It is in this way that the body responds to the delight that accompanies the moment of

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ecstasy: the body trembles, muscles and nerves contract and release. As Crooke continues his medical account of sexual experience, he admits that these violent delights harbour the threat of a violent end: on the one hand, the subject trembles in pleasurable ecstasy; on the other, it convulses to such an extent that Crooke reveals that ‘coition is called parua Epilepsia, a light Fit or falling sicknesse’. As Thomas Laqueur notes, this notion of ‘coition as a version of epilepsy’ traces back to Democritus, who considered ‘coition’ as ‘a slight attack of apoplexy’, where ‘man gushes forth from man, and is separated by being torn apart with a kind of blow’. As this chapter demonstrates, this is an ecstatic experience that threatens ‘swooning destruction’ (Tro., III.ii.21), an experience of being ‘for a time transported from ourselves’, in which both body and soul are co-partners.

To be ‘overtaken with an extasie’, then, is to be thrown beside oneself with a blow. Accordingly, both the pleasures and risks of ecstasy lie in the moment of losing control, of letting go, and Bataille reminds us that ‘pleasure is so close to ruinous waste that we refer to the moment of climax as a “little death”’.

In moments of desire, as in death, the subject loses itself as it transcends the limits that delineate it as a distinct being. For Bataille, sexual experience tests these limits of self: ‘[i]t questions the discontinuity with which the feeling of self is necessarily bound up because that [discontinuity] furnishes its limits’. The subject, in other words, discovers itself in response to the self-willed but self-annihilating forces that threaten it. Both sex and death are, for Bataille, two such forces. Sexual experience simultaneously ‘put[s] forward the possibility of continuity’ and ‘continually threaten[s] a rent in the seamless garment of the separate individuality’: it figures at once as both a promise and a threat. Accordingly, Bataille

17 Crooke, p. 279.
18 Laqueur, p. 46, n. 63.
19 Crooke, p. 200.
20 Bataille, p. 170.
21 Bataille, p. 102.
suggests, there is a necessary violence to the meeting of two bodies:

The violence of the one goes out to meet the violence of the other; on each side there is an inner compulsion to get out of the limits of individual discontinuity. There is a meeting between two beings being projected beyond their limits by the sexual orgasm. ... At the moment of conjunction the animal couple is not made up of two discontinuous beings drawing close together uniting in a current of momentary continuity: there is no real union; two individuals in the grip of violence brought together by the preordained reflexes of sexual intercourse share in a state of crisis in which both are beside themselves.22

This is not to conflate anachronistically modern and Renaissance theories of sexual experience, for while this sense of coitus as a means of transcending subjective limits is articulated by writers in both periods, the early modern subject evinces faith in the moment of ‘real union’ that Bataille denies. As Adriana articulates in *The Comedy of Errors*, asserting her husband as an indivisible, incorporate other:

> Thyself I call it, being strange to me
> That undividable, incorporate,
> Am better than thy dear self’s better part.
> Ah do not tear away thyself from me;
> For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall
> A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
> And take unmingled thence that drop again
> Without addition or diminishing,
> As take from me thyself, and not me too.

(II.ii.112-20)

If, in love, two are one, she asks, and if therefore ‘man and wife is one flesh’ (*Ham.*, IV.iii.52), then how is it possible for Antipholus to have become ‘estranged’ from the ‘undividable, incorporate’ self that they share? Informed by Aristophanes’ mythic androgyne in Plato’s *Symposium*, whereby humans are described as hermaphrodites split into two male and female selves destined to seek their other half, we here find that, in Plato’s terms, ‘love is simply the desire and pursuit of the whole’.23 The highest aspiration these lovers have, Aristophanes explains, is to experience the ecstasy of being dissolved

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22 Bataille, p. 103.
back into one. As I will demonstrate in what follows, to be ‘beside oneself’ may be, for some, a ‘state of crisis’, but such abjection is necessary for the subject who desires the pleasures of ecstasy.

i) ‘O, HAPPY DEATH’: THE PLEASURES OF ECSTASY

To understand sexual climax as a ‘little death’ (or petite mort) is, as Jennifer Pacenza notes, ‘common knowledge among those well versed in early modern literature’. For Aristotle, and later for Galen, semen was understood ‘as reconstituted blood’, and thus ‘orgasm causes a release of life-giving blood; too much blood loss was deadly’.24 ‘Stupefied with an extasie of pleasure’ in an act that will generate new life, the subject thus risks diminishing their own. Returning to Crooke, we find an array of theories as to what, in grossly material terms, semen or ‘seede’ is:

The Nature of Seede no man that I know hath yet essentially defined; Hippocrates in his Booke de Geniture calleth it, The best and strangest part of that humour which is contained in the whole body. Pythagoras, The froth of the best and most laudible blood. Plato, The defluxion of the spinal marrow. Alcmaon, A small portion of the Brayne. Zeno Criticus The spirit of a man which he looseth with moisture, and the slough of the Soule. Epicurus A fragment of the Soule and the Body.25

Common to these theories is the notion that part of oneself is evacuated in the moment of orgasm, from a humour common to one’s whole body, to a part of the brain or soul. But, for Crooke, none of these models ‘do sufficiently expresse the nature of Seede … and therefore we will not content with them’. Instead, Crooke finds seed to be a ‘double matter … compounded of a permixtion of the blood and spirits’.26 In ‘an Embleme of the holy mixtion of seedes in matrimony’, the double matter of blood and spirit are

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25 Crooke, p. 277.
26 Crooke, p. 277; 282.
‘mingled’ and ‘permix[ed]’ (*OED*, n. 2: a thorough mingling) in the ‘labyrinths’ of the veins and arteries. By this ‘new concoction’ (*The Extasie*, 27) there ‘is made one seede…’, and so begins a process of arithmetic-defying fusion, where ‘of two’ comes ‘one’: ‘of two seeds the Male and Female one infant, and of two parents the husband and wife one body’.27 As Shakespeare’s erotic computations have it, the loving couple has ‘the essence but in one’: ‘Two distincts, division none: | Number there in love was slain’ (*PhT*, 27-8). To appropriate Donne’s phrase, through ‘a single … transplant’ comes an ‘abler soul, which thence doth flow’ (*The Extasie*, 37; 43):

    Love these mix’d souls doth mix again
    And makes both one, each this and that.

    (35-6)

With seed released at the moment of orgasm—and with ‘the spirit’ being understood as ‘the first immediate instrument of the soule, disposing it selfe in the bulke of the seede’—pleasure (and by extension conception) was therefore understood to depend on the mingling of souls: ‘of the effusion of the seedes of both sexes, the pleasure thereupon conceived, and the permixtion of the seeds themselves’.28

    With soul and seed inextricably implicated, both are emitted towards their partner at the moment of orgasm; ‘I cannot help asking,’ notes Christian writer Terullian, ‘whether we do not, in that very heat of extreme gratification when the generative fluid is ejected, feel that somewhat of our soul has gone out from us?’29 The mingling of souls that Donne imagines occurring in moments of ecstasy elsewhere is thus literalized in medical texts that understood the moment of orgasm as one of soulful expulsion:

    The man therefore and the woman joined together in holy wedlock … in their mutual imbracements doe either of them yield seede the mans leaping with the greater violence. The woman at the same instant doth not only ejaculate seede into herself, but also her womb snatcheth as it were and catcheth the seede of the man. … These seeds thus cast and drawn into the bottom of the womb are out

27 Crooke, p. 279.
28 Crooke, p. 263; 296.
29 Cit. Laquer, p. 47.
of hand exquisitely mingled, otherwise sayeth Hippocrates in his Book de Naturapueri, they are neither nourished nor animated together. And if any man, sayeth he in his first Booke de diata, do deny that the Soule is mixed with the Soule, let him be held for a dotard…

It is in this way that seeds are ‘exquisitely mingled’—that is, mingling here occurs because the womb is ‘exquisite’ (ex- out; quærère, to search or seek): it seeks out and ‘snatcheth’ the male seed which is yielded to it with ‘great… violence’. Read this way, such ‘exquisite’ mingling also presents itself as an experience to be sought after: indeed, from de Sales’s desire to be ‘entirely mingled’ with the divine in Chapter One, to the ‘mutual inhesion’ of ecstatic union articulated by St. Teresa in the previous chapter, the subjects of this study would agree. But, as Crooke articulates, this experience also involves some degree of violence, a sense that is etymologically bound up with the moment of orgasm (from the Latin orgasamus, a violent action in a bodily organ). As Crooke elsewhere reminds us: ‘the seed itself is hoven with abundance of spirits which maketh it to passe orgasmo, that is, with a kind of impetuous violence’.31 ‘Haven’t you seen’, asks Lucretius in his De Rerum Natura, playing on this sense of violent mingling, ‘those whom mutual pleasure binds together, | How they are tortured in the bondage of their common tether?’32 The loving couple is unable to ‘tug apart’ once the ‘sturdy fetters of Venus [has] b[ou]nd them tight … [and] ensnare[d] | Them fast’ (IV. 124-7). Having come together in ‘holy wedlock’, the couple now come together, come simultaneously, and yield to one another ‘in their mutual imbracements’; to borrow from John Weever’s Faunus and Melliflora, ‘he gives, she takes, and nothing is denied’.33 As Ovid puts it in his Ars Amatoria, this ‘is the fulness of all sweet content | When both at once strive, both at once are spent’.34 Erotic experience,

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30 Crooke, p. 262.
31 Crooke, p. 244.
33 John Weever, Faunus and Melliflora (London: by Valentine Simmes, 1600), F r. There are also echoes here of Hero and Leander: ‘He askt, she gave, and nothing was denied’, sig. D r.
as we have heard, involves this kind of expenditure, this ‘expense of spirit’. For these writers, sex is understood as an exquisite mingling and mixing of two souls, where the act of ‘leaping’ out of oneself with ‘great … violence’ is a requisite stage in the fashioning of ‘this new soule … Of what we are compos’d, and made’ (‘The Extasie’, 45-6).

Looking to key scientific discourses in the period, there is little to be distinguished between the physiological act of ‘making love’—which, as we have seen, ‘interanimates two soules’ into ‘[t]hat abler soule’—and philosophical discussions of amorous experience and ‘mutual affection’. Common to both is the sense that the quest for union demands the subject risk ‘leaping’ out of themselves; ‘the first effect of love’, observes French theologian and poet Nicholas Coeffeteau, ‘is that it hath a uniting vertue, by means whereof it causeth him that loveth to aspire to unite himself to the thing beloved’. Echoing Platonic doctrine where the soul ‘aspire[s]’—not only ‘desires’ (OED, v. 3) but also ‘rises up’ (v. 5)—Etienne Pasquier’s philosophical discourse on love articulates how the emotion ‘so knittes and unites our minds’:

That being the cause of a perpetuall death, yet it revives us in an other, making us forget our proper condicion, to remember our selves eftsoones in an other, seconde our selves, and draws us besides by a devine power, with such a strong and indissoluble bonde … that he distils two spirites into one bodye, & by the same miracle brings to passe that two spirits be made one minde in two bodies.35

To be thrown so radically beside oneself is to become inseparably ‘knit’ and ‘unite[d]’ by an ‘indissoluble bonde’; to be in love is to die and be revived in another; to ‘forget’ and ‘remember’, to simultaneously preserve and annihilate one’s identity. This ‘mutual affection’ is, for Plato, the happiest form of ecstatic ‘mania’:

A has himself, but in B; and B has himself, but in A. … After I have lost myself, I recover myself through you. … There is only one death in mutual love, but there are two resurrections. … O, happy death, which is followed by two lives. O, wunderous exchange in which he who gives himself up for the other, and has the other, and does not cease to have himself. O, inestimable gain, when two so

become one, that each of the two, instead of one alone, becomes two.\textsuperscript{36}

True to both physical and metaphysical experiences of love, to both romantic and Platonic models of loving experience, is the condition that the subject must be willing to give themselves ‘to the other in order to receive the other’: ‘O, happy death. ... O, wonderous contract’. Negotiating this contract of mutual loss and mutual gain, these metaphysical discourses of love prepare the subject for this hazardous exchange, guiding lovers towards and mitigating the pain of this transaction: recovery ‘through you’ can only occur after ‘I have lost myself’. The terms of this contract are that both parties be willing to undergo a transaction of identity, a to-and-fro. For this is a transaction that ‘making love’ demands: the mingling of souls and seed can occur only once they have been released and given over to the other. No generation without the ‘little death’ of mutual pleasure; ‘double resurrection’ only through orgasmic ‘happy death’. It is in this way that the ecstatic subject is recompensed for taking a step beyond.

\textit{ii) ‘SWOONING DESTRUCTION’: DESIRE AND DISTINCTION IN \textit{TROILUS AND CRESSIDA}}

As he anticipates a night with Cressida, Troilus articulates how this prospect of mingling with and dying in another is both exciting and threatening:

\begin{quote}
I am giddy: expectation whirls me round.  
Th’imaginary relish is so sweet  
That it enchants my sense: what will it be  
When that the wat’ry palate tastes indeed  
Love’s thrice-reputed nectar? Death, I fear me,  
Swooning destruction, or some joy too fine,  
Too subtle-potent, tun’d too sharp in sweetness  
For the capacity of my ruder powers.  
I fear it too much; and I do fear besides  
That I shall lose distinction in my joys,  
As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps
\end{quote}

The enemy flying

\((\text{Tro.}, \text{III.ii.16-27})\)

Here, sexual experience is simultaneously dizzying, enchanting, deathly, and destructive: at once both ‘sharp’ and ‘sweet’. Above all else, it is for Troilus something to be feared: ‘I fear me … I fear it too much … I do fear’. For the ecstatic little death—a ‘joy’ at once ‘too fine’, ‘too subtle-potent’, and ‘too sharp’—threatens ‘swooning destruction’, threatens ‘that I shall lose distinction in my joys’. Troilus fears that in the face of such pleasures, his ‘joys’ will become indistinguishable from one another, that he will ‘lose the ability to distinguish one pleasure for another’, as David Bevington explains. But there is more at stake here, for Troilus also risks losing his distinguished reputation \((\text{OED}, \text{‘distinction’, n. 9})\) but, more severely, if Shakespeare’s erotic arithmetic is anything to go by, also risks losing himself.

This is, after all, a play which compulsively reminds us that ‘distinction’ is the key to identity, where ipseity is determined in relation to others. As Marianne Sanders Regan has it, translating Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic framework into a model of the subject: ‘we learn our identities by difference and differentiation from the whole, by loss of being … Our experience of the world is an experience of not-ness’. Selfhood is determined and negotiated via difference: ‘Troilus is Troilus’, for instance, because ‘he is not Hector’ (I.ii.65; 73), because he has ‘three or four hairs on his chin’ (108) and a ‘dimple’ (117) in his cheek. As Eric Langley observes, this impulse to ‘contrast a Troilus with a Paris, a Helen with a Cressida, a Trojan with a Greek, that is exhibited throughout this play of sustained comparison, is shown to be neurotically compulsive’, and, as a result, any claim to individuality is, as Langley demonstrates, ‘utterly untenable’.

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‘lose distinction’, in these circumstances, is to lose one’s sense of self. For, as the subjects of *Troilus and Cressida* variously discover, this system of difference—one that from the play’s outset sees ‘on one and other side, Trojan and Greek’ (I.0.21)—offers no stable foundation upon which to assert self as distinct from other. As Hector discovers, Greek cannot be so easily distinguished from Trojan:

> Thou art, great lord, my father’s sister’s son,  
> A cousin-german to great Priam’s seed,  
> The obligation of our blood forbids  
> A gory emulation ’twixt us twain.  
> Were thy commixtion Greek and Trojan so  
> That thou couldst say, ‘This hand is Grecian all,  
> And this is Trojan; the sinews of this leg  
> All Greek, and this all Tyor; my mother’s blood  
> Runs on the dexter cheek, and this sinister  
> Bounds in my father’s’, by Jove multipotent,  
> Thou shouldst not bear from me a Greekish member  
> Wherein my sword had not impressure made  
> Of our rank feud. …  
> Let me embrace thee, Ajax.  

(IV.v.121-36)

‘Two distincts, division none’ (*PhT*, 27): Ajax’s body cannot be split into its component ‘Greek’ and ‘Trojan’ parts, for they are here ‘commix[ed]’: what were once stable categories of distinction now no longer apply. With ‘Priam’s seed’, to recall Crooke’s terms, so ‘exquisitely mingled’ in Ajax’s Greek blood, Hector recognises the futility of seeking out distinction, and instead embraces his ‘cousin-german’. Embracing this sameness, heroic distinction is lost.

If loss of distinction is therefore not simply a concern but a reality for the subjects of *Troilus and Cressida*, then it is with good reason that Troilus feels anxious about giving himself over to the erotics of ecstasy, to the experience of being mingled with and dying in the beloved. As we have variously seen since the Bacchic rites of Chapter One, in ecstasy identities mingle, distinction is lost. ‘I do fear besides | That I shall lose distinction in my joys, | As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps | The enemy flying’: in these
circumstances, it is not simply Troilus’ joys that lie amassed in an indistinguishable ‘heap’ on the battle-field. In this joyful encounter, Troilus will himself be under charge, forced to ‘fly’ from himself like an enemy breaking ranks.\textsuperscript{40} As we have seen, this is the kind of self-departure that ecstasy demands: ‘the lover’, as Anne Carson observes, ‘helplessly admits that it feels both good and bad to be mixed up, but is then driven back upon the question “Once I have been mixed up in this way, who am I?”’.\textsuperscript{41} These are the dynamics of erotic experience that Cressida understands all too well, asserting herself as having ‘a kind of self that resides with you, | But an unkind self that itself will leave’ (135-6). These are subjects who know that desire necessarily entails some degree of self-loss, a departure from self, a ‘swooning destruction’ that, in Troilus’ case, hits almost immediately:

\begin{quote}
Even as such a passion doth embrace my bosom.
My heart beats thicker than a feverous pulse,
And all my powers do their bestowing lose.
\end{quote}

(33-5)

Pulse racing as he whirls in giddy expectation, Troilus feels himself losing control.\textsuperscript{42} As the couple make their way to bed, the poetics of desire are stripped back to reveal layers of sexual anxiety: ‘Cupid’ is substituted by ‘monsters’, and the rhetoric of soulful expulsion is swapped out for more clinical conceptions of ‘discharging’ (84). Romantic idealism, in other words, here gives way to sexual frustration (or, more properly, to frustrations with sex) and is faced with the reality that erotic experience can fall short of ‘expectation’. ‘They say all lovers swear more performance than they are able’, notes Cressida, ‘call[ing sexual] activity in [to] question’ against Pandarus’ caution: ‘and yet

\textsuperscript{40} This was, as Charles Edelman notes in \textit{Shakespeare’s Military Language: A Dictionary}, the main objective of such ‘charge[s] on heaps’: ‘The amount of space taken up by each mount means that a cavalry charge would be unlikely to inflict heavy losses at the point of contact with defending massed infantry; the main objective was to get the defenders to break and run’ (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2000), p. 84.

\textsuperscript{41} Carson, p. 37.

reserve an ability that they never perform’ (55-6; 81-3). If Troilus was fearfully anxious before, Cressida seemingly does little to put him at ease.

The ecstasy of erotic experience is thus, for Troilus and Cressida, tinged with expectation, fear, and anxiety, and as Troilus metaphorically likens Cressida’s doorway to Stygian banks, Pandarus to ‘Charon’, and himself to ‘a strange soul’ waiting for ‘waftage’ and ‘swift transportance’ (8-10), he hints at having another reason to ‘fear it much’. ‘By Charon doubtlesse death was understood’, explains Alexander Ross in his study of ‘ancient Greek and Latine poets’. But, for Ross, being ‘admitted into Charons boat’ was not necessarily something to fear, but rather something to welcome: to be greeted by Charon was to ‘have a joyfull death’.43 Thomas Dekker, musing on the meanings of a dream, similarly tells us that ‘Charon, by interpretation is Joy; for after we have ferried over the troublesome passage of death, [we] land … on the shoares of Blessednesse’.44 These are the terms in which Troilus grounds his metaphor: Pandarus’ function is to ferry Troilus over the passage of death or, in this case, the orchard, to Cressida’s heavenly ‘lily-bed’ (11). Troilus is willing to be transported, indeed wills ‘swift transportance’, towards Cressida. Prepared to risk troublesome passage, Troilus is willing to risk a ‘joyful’ little death.

However, by likening himself to a ‘strange soul upon the Stygian banks’, by articulating thoughts of ‘Love’ that so swiftly turn to thoughts of ‘Death’, Troilus displays an awareness that there may be more at risk. Charon does, after all, ‘signify… [a] Sweete Perswasion to prepare for death’, and is ‘that grim ferryman’ that will in a dream elsewhere transport the Duke of Clarence’s ‘stranger soul’ unto ‘the kingdom of perpetual night’ (R2, I.iv.47).45 At stake here, very simply, is not just an ecstatic loss of distinction, but loss

45 Dekker, p. 17.
of life. For in Pasquier’s notion of ‘perpetual death’, in Troilus’ fears of ‘Death’ and ‘destruction’, lies not only the intense pleasure of an orgasmic *petite mort*, but also an awareness that with each ‘little death’ the subject draws one step closer to actual death, for ‘each such an Act, they say, | Diminisheth the length of life a day’ (Donne, ‘Farewell to Love’, 24-5). The agonising nature of ecstasy, as understood thus far in this study, is that it can only ever function as a promissory note for wonders that are to come after death. And yet here, for the subject in the thralls of sexual pleasure, ecstasy seemingly threatens to make good on that promise by drawing death closer: ‘we kill ourselves to propagate our kind’, laments Donne in ‘The First Anniversarie’ (110). ‘Th’expense of Spirit’, very simply, comes at a deathly cost. Where religious ecstasy offered the subject a glimpse of future pleasures, sexual ecstasy tinges that glimpse with an immediate threat; this may be ‘a bliss in proof’, as the speaker of Shakespeare’s ‘Sonnet 129’ has it, but once ‘proved, [it is] a very woe’ (11). The stakes are higher, the pulse is faster, for the subject who is open to sexual ecstasy, and who feels more keenly the dangers of losing control. This is not, in other words, a glimpse of heavenly splendour: this is ‘the heaven that leads men to ... hell[ish]’ anguish (‘Sonnet 129’, 14). The lustful subject finds that they are losing time: the subject who makes love is time’s fool.46

And so there is, as ever, a negative flip-side to the experience of being thrown beside oneself, for as the subject races towards ecstatic pleasure, it finds lurking there a tenor of death. As Carson writes, articulating an anxiety shared by the subjects of this chapter thus far: ‘when an individual appreciates that he alone is responsible for the content and coherence of his person, an influx like eros becomes a concrete personal

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46 See also Marcus Norlund, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Love: Literature, Culture, Evolution* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007). Norlund here identifies a heightened sense of time in *Troilus and Cressida*, and considers the extent to which Cressida’s attempts to ‘buy time and prolong the courtship’ with Troilus are ‘eroded by the intensity of her own passion’, p. 144.
threat. ... Union would be annihilating’. Erotic experience is at once ‘enjoyed’ and ‘despisèd’, ‘hunted’ and ‘hated’. ‘Sonnet 129’ articulates sex as an extreme experience, one that holds in tension both erotic hell—‘not to trust’—and erotic heaven: ‘Before, a joy proposed, behind, a dream’. In Peter J. Smith’s terms, the sonnet ‘demonstrates the overwhelming and all-consuming nature of sexual desire ... desire which occupies every waking moment’. ‘Mad in pursuit’, the subject rushes to arrive at the moment of orgasm—‘had, having, and in quest to have, extreme’—but ‘no sooner had’ retreats into a state of tormented anguish. But this is not simply a lament that death lies in the margins of sexual experience, but also that the whole experience is fleeting: ‘enjoyed no sooner but despised straight’; ‘no sooner had | Past reason hated’ (5; 6-7, emphasis added). ‘No sooner had [and it is] past’: this ecstasy is over too quickly. As Ben Jonson’s translation of Petronius has it: ‘Doing, a filthy pleasure is, and short; | And done, we straight repent us of the sport’. ‘This is’, Troilus notes, ‘the monstrosity of love’: ‘that the will is infinite and the execution confined; that the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit’ (Tra., III.ii.77-80). It is in these circumstances that we find subjects threatening to bid ‘Farewell to Love’ altogether:

... man should despise
The sport,
Because that other curse of being short,
And onely for a minute made to be
Eager, desires to raise posterity.

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47 Carson, p. 45; 62.
50 Montaigne would agree with Troilus’ term ‘monstrosity’ here: ‘What monster is it, that this teare or drop of seed, whereof we are ingendred brings with it...’ (II.27.427). For both Montaigne and Troilus, there is something unnatural and anxiety inducing at the heart of sexual experience. As Ian Frederick Moulton considers in light of Montaigne’s claim: ‘That this most “natural” of acts—sexual generation of offspring—could be seen as monstrous, and therefore “unnatural”, indicates the ambivalence at the heart of early modern understandings of both parenthood and of the sexual attraction that generates children’—‘Monstrous Teardrops: The Materiality of Early Modern Affection’, in Historical Affects and the Early Modern Theatre, ed. Ronda Arab, Michelle Dowd, and Adam Zucker (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 69-81 (70).
Since so, my minde
Shall not desire what no man else can finde,
I'll no more dote and runne
To persue things which had indammag’d me.51

Unlike Donne’s poem ‘The Extasie’ which, as we have seen, offers a sustained glimpse of the orgasmic moment of inter-animation, Donne here finds little reward for that kind of expenditure. Quite the opposite: this is an experience that, as Troilus’ ‘swooning destruction’ can attest, can ‘indammag[e]’. Accordingly, the speaker vows to close themselves off to such experience: ‘I’ll no more dote and runne’. As Lucretius advises, ‘it’s easier to avoid the toils of love than extricate | Yourself once you’re caught fast in the nets’.52 What we are presented with, then, are subjects who are unwilling to ‘expend themselves’ because the cost of ‘persue[ing] things which had indammag’d me’ is too great. As was true of the religious subjects in the previous chapter, the radical return to self that follows ecstasy is painfully disappointing ‘[W]hat the[se] lovers feel … is not some pure and simple bliss’, for ‘there are stings that lurk beneath it’.53 ‘They feel pleasure indeed’, Sibbes concurs, ‘but the sting comes after’.54 We know by now that there is always agony in ecstasy.

What this chapter identifies is that the erotic moment is as much about the experience of being in projection as it is about ‘the consummation | Devoutly to be wished’ (Ham., III.i.63-4). The subject driven by desire finds that the ecstatic experience is not simply a celebration of the moment of arrival (and, subsequently, a lament of return), but also demonstrates there to be something wonderfully vibrative, something

51 Donne, ‘Farewell to Love’, in Complete Poems, pp. 121-3 (ll. 26-34). Gloucester similarly articulates sexual experience in terms of ‘sport’ in King Lear, remarking that ‘there was good sport at [Edmund’s] making’ (I.i.18).
52 Lucretius, De Rerum, ll. 1146-7.
53 De Rerum, ll. 1081-2.
equally rapturous, about the ‘quest to have, extreme’, of the ‘swift transportance’ out of oneself and towards the beloved. Trembling towards petite mort, trembling in ecstasy, trembling at the edge of irrecoverable self-dissolution, it is here that the subject willingly puts themselves at risk, and here they glimpse the rewards of that endeavour. It is the prospect of ecstasy that draws subjects towards this border. To appropriate Derrida’s thinking regarding the sublime, and to echo the discussions of Chapter One, ecstasy is ‘the experience of the border and of overflowing, the trembling apprehension of that which, touching on the border, at once goes overboard and remains at the border, holding out and holding back’.\footnote{Jacques Derrida, \textit{On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy}, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 109.} In ecstasy, the subject trembles at this threshold.
II. ‘KILL ME ONCE AGAIN’: TREMBLING ECSTASY IN *VENUS AND ADONIS*

But now I lived, and life was death’s annoy;
But now I died, and death was lively joy.

(*Ven., 497-9*)

‘To kiss and be kissed’ is, according to Robert Burton, ‘a most forcible battery, as infectious ... as the poison of a spider’. This ‘strong assault’, this ‘prologue to burning lust’, is powerful enough to move the soul, and, accordingly, woven into Burton’s chapter on ‘Love Melancholy’ is a series of poetic accounts of ‘they [that] kissed again and again, and as they joined their lips their souls also commingled’, those who claim to have ‘transferred [their] souls to one another through [their] lips’. Recalling Dante’s *Convivio*, Italian writer Annibale Romei elsewhere tells his readers ‘that [through] kissing, the soule commeth into the lippes, from whence it flieth out, and is received’; ‘a kisse’, he considers, ‘is rather a conjunction of soule then body, for by means of a kisse, a most pleasing passage ... the soules of lovers remaine so bound togethre by the undivided knot of love, that of two there[c] is made one’. As Robert Greene has it, ‘by the breath the soule fleeteth, And soule with soule in kissing meeteth’. With a kiss the soul melts on the lips; with a kiss the soul can be ‘suck[ed] forth’; with a kiss two souls can be bound together. Such ideas were articulated in Baldesar Castiglione’s vastly influential *Book of*

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56 A *Winter’s Tale* dramatizes the dangerous potential of a (misread) kiss, which is similarly articulated in terms of having ‘drunk, and seen the spider’ (II.i.45).
60 The notion of souls melting on lips is also seen in Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*; ‘Sweete Helen, make me immortall with a kisse: | Her lips suckes forth my soule, see where it flies: | Come Helen, come give me my soule againe. | Here wil I dwel, for heaven be in these lips, | And all is drosse that is not Helena’ (London: by Valentine Simmes, 1604), sigs. E4r-F3.
the Courtier, where he considers the dangers and virtues of such amorous activity:

For sin[c]e a kisse is a knitting together both of body and soule, it is to be feared, least the sensuall lover will be more inclined to the part of the bodye, then of the soule. … That bonde is the openynge of an entry to the soules, whiche drawen with a counting the one of the other, power them selves by tourn, the one into the others bodye, and be so mingled together, that e[ach] of them hath two soules, and one alone so framed of them both ruleth (in a maner) two bodyes. Whereupon a kisse may be said to be rather a cooplinge together of the soule, then the bodye, bicause it hath suche force in her, that it draweth her unto it, and (as it were) seperateth her from the bodye. For this do all chast[e] lovers covett a kisse, as a cooplinge of soules together.61

‘Openynge’ up an ‘entry’ into the self, the kiss, like the sexual activity of the previous section, occasions a mingling, a knitting, a coupling of those who partake: body to body, soul to soul. Both within and outside of early modern poetry, therefore, we find a keen interest in the metaphysical potential of the kiss. If souls could be exchanged simultaneously with breath, then a kiss could bind lovers together both physically and spiritually; a kiss is not simply a joining of two bodies, but is a site of a connection, a mingling, a marriage of minds.

Kisses are, therefore, a hyperbolic manifestation of a familiar dynamic, where souls are passed to-and-fro between lover and beloved. This kind of experience manifests what Selleck’s study defines as The Interpersonal Idiom, whereby the self is figured ‘as a process of interpersonal exchange’: where ‘the self not only encounters and responds to the other, [but also] emerges through the conceptual framework of the other’.62 If ‘all chast[e] lovers covett a kiss, as a coopling of soules together’, so too must they recognise that to exchange a kiss is, in some crucial sense, to transfer an exiled self. After all, in terms that are central to this chapter’s understanding of ecstatic experience, the experience of ‘lips on lips’ (Vén., 120) is a reminder of boundaries: the kiss occurs at the threshold of a precarious self. As Carla Mazzio explains, ‘skin is at once a boundary

62 Selleck, pp. 34-5; 4. Selleck here situates her interpersonal subject in relation to Bakhtin’s model of subjectivity.
between the self and an organ of sense perception through which the world can be let in. The function of the skin is to contain the subject: to keep it intact (contained, whole) but also the site of tact (of touch, of interaction): to demarcate the boundaries of the subject from the world, while simultaneously providing an opportunity to share in it. It is this dual function that has prompted Michel Serres’ identification of skin as ‘where the ego is decided’, a notion explored elsewhere by psychologist Didier Anzieu who, reading literally the surface of Sigmund Freud’s body-ego, conceives of a ‘skin ego’:

The surface of the body allows us to distinguish excitations of external origins from those of internal origin; just as one of the capital functions of the ego is to distinguish between what belongs to me myself and what does not belong, between what comes from me and the desires, thoughts and affects of others, between a physical (the world) or biological (the body) reality outside the mind, the ego is the projection in the psychic of the surface of the body, namely the skin, which makes up this sheet or interface.

In these models, identity is located at and across the skin’s surface. ‘It is only at the boundary’, as Claudia Benthien asserts, ‘that subjects can encounter each other’: identity, in other words, is negotiated at the body’s threshold. For Imogen Tyler, following Julia Kristeva, ‘human skin is always involved in abjection’: ‘it is the border zone upon which self and not-self is perpetually played out. It is the bodily site at which abjection occurs’. The skin, therefore, is a site of interaction, and the experience of ‘Eros’, in Carson’s terms, ‘is an issue of boundaries’: more specifically, ‘the boundary of flesh and self’

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between you and me’. Understanding the kiss as a site where soul and self could be transacted, and informed by these discussions that assert the skin as an envelope, a border, a threshold of the self, I here posit the extent to which this model can be contracted down to the lips. It is the lips, in this reading, ‘where the ego is decided’.

As a forerunner to erotic consummation, the kiss seemingly operates within the same dynamics as the act of sex itself; echoing the discussions outlined in the previous section, souls are here understood as being fluid, sent out, and mingled. Like sex, a kiss is hyperbolically imagined as being a site of both life and death: here impassioned subjects die in one another; here they are revived. These ideas are explored in the ‘kiss poetry’ or basia of Dutch poet Johannes Secundas (first published posthumously in 1539), whose collection of poems, as Pablo Maurette has argued, had profound influence on poets such as Christopher Marlowe, Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Ben Jonson, and Shakespeare. Influenced himself by the amatory poetics of Hellenistic and Greek writers, Secundas can be seen as ‘taking the kissing motif to a new level by elevating it to the category of a sub-genre, and “placing it at the same level of odes, and elegies”’. Here, in what Thomas Nashe refers to as the ‘booke of the two hundred kinde of leises’, providing another hint at the kiss as something that could cause harm (OED, ‘lese’, n. To cause loss, damage or harm), Secundas employs the common motif of the kiss as constituting a liminal space between life and death:

To suck your trembling tongue with my plaintive lips,
And mix two souls in one mouth,
And then when our love languishes to the point of resembling death,
To diffuse our bodies one into one another.

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67 Carson, p. 30.
69 Maurette, p. 360.
70 Thomas Nashe, Lenten Stuffe (London: [by Thomas Judson and Valentine Simmes], 1599), pp. 23-4. In certain modern editions of the text, ‘leise’ is substituted by ‘kisses’: see, for instance,
One soul in two bodies; two souls in one mouth. Here, life is simultaneously sucked out of and breathed into the subject, and therefore just as kisses mingle souls, life and death are similarly entangled. It is in these circumstances that poet William Drummond would come to express this chiasmus of life and death as being intrinsic to ‘The qualitie of a Kisse’ (1616), echoing the epigraph to this chapter as he vacillates between the polarities of what Shakespeare’s Venus considers to be death’s ‘lively joy’:

The Kisse with so much Strife,
Which I late got (sweet Heart)
Was it a Singe of Death, or was it Life?
Of Life it could not bee,
For I by it did sigh my Soule in thee,
Nor was it Death, Death doth no Joy impart:
Thou silent stand’st, ah! What thou didst bequeath,
To mee a dying life was, living Death.71

A kiss, exchanged in a period neurotically aware of the cost of contact, holds life and death in the balance, and brings the subject to this joyfully dangerous threshold.72

Central to this study is this sense of the ecstatic subject as one repeatedly drawn to the threshold. For the subjects of the previous chapter, this threshold was one that offered a glimpse of divine union. As we saw of A Midsummer Night’s Dream, taking a literal step outside of Athens’ walls, crossing the threshold into the forest, facilitated ecstatic union with the beloved. Ecstasy, very simply, is only attainable beyond the threshold: it is only there that we are offered a glimpse (for we know by now that ecstasy is only temporary) of the union that lies beyond it. What this chapter has demonstrated thus far

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71 William Drummond, Poems (Edinburgh: by Andro Hart, 1616), sig. N3r.
72 This was, afterall, a period that understood contagion to occur at sites of contact—from contigere, ‘to touch’. See Frédéric Charbonneau, ‘Quarantine and Caress’, in Imagining Contagion in Early Modern Europe, ed. Claire L. Carlin (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 124-36, and Rebecca Totaro and Ernest B. Gilman (eds.), Representing the Plague in Early Modern Europe.
is the extent to which this ecstatic threshold is not only spiritual or geographic, but also maps on to discourses of the body, especially in moments of amorous and erotic encounter. As we have seen since the first chapter, ecstasy could be an intensely double-edged physical experience—that is, the ecstatic experience could be achieved through physical contact, but could also have deleterious effects on the body. Having demonstrated how ecstasy could be achieved through physical contact, this chapter will now explore how this ecstatic threshold is embodied, situated at the corporeal edges of the subject. Taking Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* as its central text, what follows argues that the kiss represents this threshold, and suggests how the poem’s obsession with kissing—indeed Shakespeare uses the word here more than in any other work—is symptomatic of a text which locates desire at the limin, in suspended ecstasis. Observing how the poem, like Venus, ‘stands … in trembling ecstasy’ (*Vén.*, 895), I attend to the dangerous complexities of this liminal space where time, life, and death all hang in suspension. Exploring a poem where Shakespeare approaches, in Joe Moshenka’s terms, ‘the question of what it would mean for a human to touch a divine body in an entirely new way’, what follows considers how the ecstasy of divine union could be embodied in the act of a kiss.\(^{73}\)

If a kiss represents a threshold at which the bodies and souls of lovers can come together, then it is towards this liminal moment that Venus aspires. For, as Castiglione had it, ‘all chast[e] lovers covett a kisse’, and Venus is love: ‘she’s love, she loves’ (*Vén.*, 610). But this complex mythological figure embodies much more. As interpretations of Venus proliferated throughout the Renaissance—indeed we have already heard about the goddess’ ‘sturdy fetters’ from Lucretius—the ‘queen of love’ (251) ‘simmers with

alternative meanings and associations’. For the period inherited not one but an array of Venuses from classical tradition. In Ficino’s Commentary on Plato’s Symposium, for instance, we are told that ‘Venus is two-fold’, while Cicero ‘discovered no less than four’, and ‘Giraldi no less than fifty’. Yet while in philosophical treatises we encounter Venus in various guises, Renaissance poets, as mythographer Julianus Aurelius Haurech notes, ‘often fail to distinguish’ between these various Venuses, and instead ‘assume there is just one Venus’, a Venus that embodied a range of associations, from Venus vulgaris (sensual love) to Venus mechanitis (verbal artifice) to Venus Genetrix (the mother). ‘And yet’, despite it all, Shakespeare’s Venus ‘is not loved’ (Vēn., 610), and is at risk of losing herself in the excesses of that solipsistic emotion. In Shakespeare’s narrative poem, first appearing in 1593 as plague closed London’s theatres and turned playwrights to non-dramatic verse, the goddess of love is herself ‘love-sick’ (175): she is not desired, but is rather absorbed in a state of desire. With Venus ‘unexpectedly appear[ing] as a desiring subject’, Shakespeare’s poem inverts both the traditional narratives that see her as the subject of desire, as well as the relationship between subject and divine. For here is a god made flesh—‘this love-sick queen began to sweat’ (195)—a god presented in the tactile terms yearned for by the subjects of the previous chapter. While early moderns no longer believed in the existence or divinity of classical deities, Venus remained ‘for many Renaissance readers … the allegorical figure of elemental passion’. This is not a goddess
with whom subjects sought union, but who instead embodied the kind of precarious mingling that we have thus far understood as being a fundamental part of erotic and amorous experience. ‘I assure you’, asserts Plutarch, ‘Venus is the work-mistresse of mutual concord, solace and benevolence between men and women, mingling and melting (as it were) together with the bodies their soules also, by means of pleasure’. 79

That kissing should be central to Shakespeare’s narrative, therefore, perhaps comes as no surprise, nor was it necessarily anything new. It is, after all, a kiss that causes the goddess to fall for Adonis in the Ovidian narrative, when her son Cupid accidentally wounds her with one of his arrows as he kisses her:

For as the armed Cupid kist Dame Venus, unbeware
An arrow sticking out did raze hir brest uppon the bare.
The Goddesse being wounded, thrust away her sonne. The wound
Appeered not too be so deepe as afterward was found. 80

With this kiss comes accidental, and irrecoverable, damage; proximity to Cupid’s quiver leaves Venus trembling with desire: now ‘the beawty of the lad | Inflaamd her’; now ‘shee lovd Adonis more | Than heaven’. 81 Putting to one side the incestuous frame of the Ovidian account—one that has been explored in detail by critics such as Philip Hardie, Barbara Pavlick, and Karen Newman—what the passage brings into focus is the dangerous potential of desire, and the dangers of getting too close. 82 As Derrida observes in his examination of touch, the tactile semantics of sexual experience dissolve dissymmetrical opposition between the caress and the blow, stroking and striking; the pleasure of contact is not easily distinguishable from the destructive touch; akin to the

81 Ibid., 610-5.
orgasmic ‘kind of blow’ that Democritus articulated in the previous section, ‘a caress may be a blow and vice versa’. This tension between intense sexual passion and threat of physical harm is present from the outset of Shakespeare’s poem, and throughout his characterization of Venus. Indeed, when Venus first addresses Adonis, it is with a threateningly impassioned offer: ‘I’ll smother thee with kisses’ (Vên., 18). As Moshenska observes in Feeling Pleasures, ‘the verb that Shakespeare’s Venus associates with her kissing—“smother”—captures the force of her feeling while also suggesting … a real physical threat’. Offering to ‘smother [Adonis] with kisses’, Venus balances violence and passion and thus brings the more sinister implications of ‘d[ying] upon a kiss’ (Oth., Vii.358) into the realm of possibility. As we shall see, this is a character who, recalling Narcissus who ‘died to kiss his shadow’ (162) and who herself ‘murder[s]’ Adonis’ words ‘with a kiss’ (54), is well aware of this deadly potential. In Venus and Adonis, kisses are imbued with violent energy from the outset.

That kisses should operate as both deathly threats and amorous offers should by now seem a familiar trope, for, as we have seen, notions of the kiss as a liminal space between life and death were well established in poetry of the period. But what Shakespeare offers is a text that seeks to situate itself within that liminal space. As the poet ‘dispenses with the usual introductory niceties of mythological literature and throws us right into the action in media res’, the text carves out an interim, bracketed by the action of the hunt, that Venus will try to prolong for as long as possible. ‘Trembling in her passion’ (Vên., 27), Venus’ offer reveals her key motivations: to hold Adonis, and to hold on to him for as long as possible in order to postpone his departure. Accordingly,

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83 Derrida, On Touching, p. 69.
84 Moshenska, p. 103.
85 Maurette, p. 370.
86 Maurette considers how even ‘the rhythm of the sextet’ contributes to the goddess’ attempts to ‘postpone Adonis’ inevitable departure’, with its ‘rhyming couplets mak[ing] one dwell and linger in each stanza before passing on to the next’, pp. 369-70.
she offers him ‘fresh variety’:

Ten kisses short as one, one as long as twenty,
A summer’s day will seem an hour but short,
Being wasted in such time-beguiling sport.

Offering kisses ‘long’ and ‘short’, biting kisses that turn lips simultaneously ‘red’ and ‘pale’ (20), kisses that gain ‘intr’est’ (209) and multiply, kisses as ‘debts[s]’ that can ‘double’ (521) and, pushing the ‘limit[s]’ (235) of kiss-poetry, kisses that ‘stray lower’ (234), Venus makes good on her promise of ‘fresh variety’. As she kisses Adonis all over—‘his brow, his cheek, his chin’—singular kisses are transformed into one that knows no end: ‘and where she ends she doth anew begin’ (59-60). For Venus, ‘ten kisses’ can merge into ‘one’, one into twenty: ‘quickly told and quickly gone’ (520). Like Serres’ Hegelian conception of non-linear time, a kiss ‘is not set, although it can become one, it goes in bursts’. A kiss, she tells Adonis, is able to stretch time, can propel its participants into a new temporal horizon where ‘hours are long, though seeming short’ (842). This ‘time-beguiling sport’ is therefore not simply an erotic pass-time, but a suspension of time altogether; kissing will suspend time, and together in this locus amoenus they can enjoy the interim. As Antony has it elsewhere, entreating Cleopatra that they ‘not confound the time’ but rather make good use of it: ‘for the love of Love and her soft hours … There’s not a minute of our lives should stretch | Without some pleasure now’ (Ant., I.i.45-8). For what a kiss offers, and what the first section of this chapter understood sex to deny, is infinite elongation: a moment that can be extended for as long as the subject desires; a temporal protraction without climax that leaves the subject wanting more rather than wishing that they had never had it at all. While the moment of sexual climax is, as it is in ‘Sonnet 129’, ‘despisèd straight’, a kiss offers a period of sustained (and sustainable) ‘bliss’ that leaves the subject...

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wanting more, ‘mad in pursuit’, trembling in a ‘time-beguiling’ ecstasy that can last for as long as lips are met. ‘Th’expense of spirit’ is not ‘wasted in such … sport’: ‘long may they kiss each other…” (Ven., 505).

Thus Venus drives towards that moment of amorous interaction; ‘trembling in her passion’, she operates at high speed. Like ‘an empty eagle’ she is ‘sharp but fast’ (55), ‘duck[ing] quickly in’ (86) and seeking immediate reciprocal response from her beloved, eagerly waiting with ‘lips … ready’ for ‘lips on lips’ as ‘eyes in eyes’ (89; 120): ‘give me one kiss’, she begs, ‘I’ll give it thee again’ (209). But by comparison, Adonis—repeatedly described and describing himself as ‘unripe’, ‘unfinished’ (128; 415), and therefore before his time—is characterized in contrast to Venus not in terms of quick movement, but rather in those of stillness: ‘lazy sprite … liveless picture … stone … idol, image dull and dead … statue’ (211-3). Thus Venus finds Adonis unwilling to match her pace—‘make use of time’, she urges, ‘let not advantage slip’ (129)—but to no avail. For the more Venus craves interaction, the more Adonis seeks isolation; ‘let go, and let me go’, he entreats, ‘I pray you hence, and leave me here alone’ (379; 382). ‘I know not love, nor will I know it’, he announces, for having ‘heard it is a life in death’, Adonis is not willing to take that risk, ‘unless it be a boar’ (409; 413; 410). Repulsed by her compulsiveness, Adonis remains closed off, ‘unyielding’, refusing to ‘ope the gate’ to Venus ‘seige’, ‘for where a heart is hard’ her advances ‘make no batt’ry’ (423-6). This ‘flint-hearted boy’ (95), she complains, will not yield even ‘one sweet kiss’ (84) to she who so desperately craves it: “tis but a kiss I beg, why art thou coy?” (96). As Venus laments in Samuel Holland’s masque of the lovers: ‘When, when O when shall Venus find, | The flinty-soul’d Adonis kind [?]’.

In Adonis, then, we are presented with the opposite of Burton’s amorous subjects who ‘sometimes … lie open and are most tractable and coming, apt, yielding, and willing

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to embrace’.\(^{89}\) In the previous chapter, Donne made clear the necessity of ‘a good, tractable, and ductile disposition’ for those who wish to experience the ecstasy of union with the divine.\(^{90}\) But face to face with the ‘queen of love’ (251), Adonis has no such desire; if Venus suffers from ‘intractable passion’, as Catherine Belsey has it, her passion is intensified by Adonis’ intractability.\(^{91}\) While we have heard elsewhere of the divine capacity to make ‘the flintyest heart contrite and humble’, Venus seemingly has no such power:\(^{92}\)

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Art thou obdurate, flinty, hard as steel?} \\
\text{Nay, more than flint, for stone at rain relenteth;} \\
\text{Art thou a woman’s son, and canst not feel} \\
\text{What ’tis to love, how want of love tormenteth?}
\end{align*}
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(199-202)

Priding herself as having been able to ‘oversway’ the ‘strong-tempered steel’ of the ‘direful god of war’ (109-10; 98), Venus is unable to bend Adonis to her will: ‘he turns his lips another way’ (90); ‘he will not in her arms be bound’ (226); ‘from thence he struggles to be gone’ (228). ‘Hard as steel’, Adonis is not of a ductile disposition, is not the attentively ‘tender boy’ (32) she would have him be and so, unlike the subject who will willingly make themselves tractable to the divine or beloved, cannot be the enjoyer ‘of such tendernesses, of such Extasies of … Love’.\(^{93}\) He is, in this, the antithesis of an ecstatic subject, refusing to send himself out because to ‘grow unto himself was his desire’ (1180). In contrast to the ‘queen of love’ (251)—so ecstatically tractable that she imagines simply the sight of Adonis’ ‘outward parts’ could ‘move | Each part in [her] that were but sensible’ (435-6)—Adonis is characterized as being so ‘flint-hearted’, so ‘obdurate, flinty, [and] hard as steel’, that Venus has reason to fear that if Adonis can steal her heart,

\(^{89}\) Burton, III.113.
\(^{90}\) Donne, Five Sermons, p. 21.
\(^{91}\) Belsey, p. 258.
\(^{92}\) Watkinson, p. 22.
he just might be able to ‘steel’ it too:

‘Give me my hand’, saith he. ‘Why dost thou feel it?’
‘Give me my heart’, saith she, ‘and thou shalt have it.
O give it me, lest thy hard heart do steel it,
And being steeled, soft sighs can never grave it.
   Then love’s deep groans I never shall regard,
   Because Adonis’ heart hath made mine hard’.

(373-8)

Craving his kiss, denied the ‘little death’ she desires, Venus takes alternative action; unable to persuade Adonis to meet ‘lips on lips’, the goddess instead tricks him into this mouth-to-mouth contract. Falling into a swoon—an embodied ecstasy that the next chapter demonstrates as finding its crescendo in Othello’s trance—Venus forces the narrative to a standstill, interrupting Adonis’ speech not by ‘stop[ping] his lips’ (46), but by effectively forcing him to start using them. While Venus earlier ‘murders with a kiss’ (54), their second kiss will bring Venus back to life: ‘The silly boy, believing she is dead, | Claps her cheek, till clapping make it red … For on the grass she lies as she were slain, | Till his breath breatheth life in her again’ (467-8; 473-4). Seeking to rouse her from this deathlike swoon, Adonis ‘wrings’, ‘strikes’, ‘bends’ and ‘chafes’ Venus’ face and body, exhausting all options before, eventually, ‘he kisses her’ (475-9). We hear elsewhere of kisses that bring subjects back from this deathly threshold, as Venus will later assert her swoon to have been. In other epyllia texts such as Hero and Leander, for instance, Hero, ‘viewing Leanders face, fell downe and fainted. | He kist her, and breath’d life into her lips’.94 Shakespeare’s Romeo, too, will dream of such revival:

   I dreamt my lady came and found me dead—
   Strange dream, that gives a dead man leave to think!—
   And breathed such life with kisses in my lips,
   That I revived, and was an emperor.

   (Rom., Vi.6-9)

Things are, however, not so straightforward for Adonis, whose kiss is met with Venus’

attempt to prolong her swoon, and so the kiss, for as long as possible: ‘He kisses her, and she by her good will | Will never rise, so he will kiss her still’ (*Ven.*, 479-80). Once again, Venus betrays her desire to extend time, to reside at the threshold, and demonstrates the kiss as being the perfect way of achieving that extension; the longer she can hold on to this kiss, the longer she can keep the action of the narrative in pause, the longer she can keep Adonis safe in this interim. ‘Fall[ing] flatly down’ (463), Venus thus attempts to situate herself, and her body, at this threshold. As she comes to herself, Venus tries to hold on to this interim-state; ‘O where am I?’, she asks, ‘in earth or heaven?’:

Or in the ocean drenches, or in the fire?
What hour is this? Or morn, or weary eve?
Do I delight to die, or life desire?
But now I lived, and life was death’s annoy;
But now I died, and death was lively joy.

(493-8)

‘But now I lived … But now I died’: discovering ‘lively joy’ in ‘death’, Venus trembles at the edge of these extremes. Having performed this little death, and having tricked Adonis into a temporary exchange of breath, Venus finds herself tantalisingly close to achieving what the narratives of kissing and sexual union repeatedly promised: the ‘happy death’ of dying in, and being revived by, the beloved. Adonis has at once ‘murd’red [Venus’] poor heart’ (502), and, with a kiss, brought her back from the brink, and now she seeks a repeat performance: ‘Thou didst kill me, kill me once again!’ (499). Able to both give life and take it away, kisses have maintained their dangerous potential.

Yet while Venus hopes for a kiss that will mingle their souls together, the ‘flint-hearted’ Adonis considers a kiss as offering quite the opposite; where Venus asks for ‘ten thousand kisses’—‘is twenty thousand kisses such a trouble?’—Adonis reluctantly offers

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to yield one: ‘Now let me say good night, and … if you will say so, you shall have a kiss’ (517; 522; 533-6, emphasis added). For Adonis, a kiss is not a catalyst for inter-animation, but is rather an opportunity for disentanglement. In this, the poem finally moves towards the union that Venus has been driving towards but, as ever, this ecstasy cannot last. What was, in the previous chapter, a moment of divine inspiration, is here embodied in the act of a kiss, as the poem’s midway point gives way to a moment of ecstatic union: ‘incorporate they seem, face grows to face’ (540). ‘And now came I to have a sight of those invisible things … But I was not able to fixe mine eye long upon them’: just as Augustine was anguished by his fleeting vision, just as St. Paul ‘did lose that sight again’, Venus begins to feel the agony of ecstasy as the ‘breathless’ Adonis ‘disjoin[s]’ and draws backwards (541).96 Determined not to ‘lose that sight again’, Venus seeks to extend this moment with another kiss:

He with her plenty pressed, she faint with dearth,
Their lips together glued, fall to the earth.

Now quick desire hath caught the yielding prey,
And glutton-like she feeds, yet never filleth;
Her lips are conquerers, his lips obey,
Payng what ransom the insulter willeth,
   Who vulture thought doth pitch the price so high
   That she will draw his lips’ rich treasure dry.

(545-52)

But as we have seen time and again, total union is not available; ecstasy is only ever a promissory note that leaves the subject wanting more: ‘she feeds, yet never filleth’ and so ‘begins to forage’ in ‘blindfold fury’ (553). ‘Mad in pursuit and in possession so, | Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme’: as the speaker of ‘Sonnet 129’ had it, this is ‘lust in action’, and Venus loses herself in that experience. But so too does Adonis. ‘Hot’ from Venus ‘hard embracing’ (339), Adonis is, for a moment, pliable to the goddess’s will, is of a ductile disposition, as the ‘wax so frozen … dissolves with temp’ring, | And yields at

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96 Augustine, Confessions, xvii.397; Donne, LXXX Sermons, p. 239.
last to every light impression’ (565-6). ‘At last’ this impressionable youth is impressed by Venus, and vice versa; with the goddess having expressed her willingness for Adonis to impress her—‘sweat seals in my soft lips imprinted’; ‘set thy seal manual on my wax-red lips’ (511; 516)—impassioned experience now brings about mutual impression, and the couple simultaneously figure as both wax and metal under the impress of one another’s lips. With ‘their lips together glued’, we here glimpse a melding of identities, ‘a bliss in proof …’:

‘… And proved, a very woe’ (‘Sonnet 129’, 11). Like the kiss that made it possible, this ecstatic interval cannot last. While the first half of the poem saw Venus race towards the moment of union—with ‘quick desire’ not satisfied until it ‘hath caught the yielding prey’—Venus makes one final attempt to prolong it; her ‘yoking arms’ (Ven., 592) cause the pair to tumble together—‘he on her belly, she on her back’ (594)—but the moment is an empty climax, lacking sexual union:

Now is she in the very lists of love,
Her champion mounted for the hot encounter.
All is imaginary she doth prove;
He will not manage her, although he mounted her:
    That worse than Tantalus’ is her annoy,
    To clip Elizium and to lack her joy.

(595-600)

She has ‘clip[ped] Elizium’, embraced paradise; heaven is at once both tantalisingly close and kept at an agonising distance. Attempts to distract Adonis ‘with continual kissing’ are ‘all in vain’ (606; 607), and Venus is no longer able to suspend the narrative by ‘withhold[ing]’ (612) Adonis from the hunt. Within a few stanzas, Venus’ hopes of ‘little death’ are quickly translated into fears of her beloved’s demise; demands for Adonis to ‘kill me once again’ now become pleas for him to ‘come not within … danger’ of the boar ‘bent to kill’ (639; 618). With this shift, the experience of ecstasy is similarly translated; ‘trembling ecstasy’ no longer signals Venus in a state of passion, but rather paralysed with
fear: ‘when thou didst name the boar, not to dissemble, | I feared thy fortune and all my joints did tremble’ (641-2). ‘What is it makes you tremble?’: while the poem offers no single answer to Derrida’s question, it demonstrates trembling as the effect of ecstatic extremis (ex-trem-is) on the body.\textsuperscript{97} As we have seen, for Venus, ecstasy is an intensely physical experience, one that can be achieved through physical actions such as kissing, and one that also manifests itself physically; ‘ecstasy’, notes Serres, ‘builds up in the dark core of the lower muscles, quivering and trembling before bursting forth’.\textsuperscript{98} Ecstasy, in its myriad forms, so often leaves its subjects trembling—and elsewhere Shakespeare encourages us to ‘mark how [Antipholus] trembles in his ecstasy’ (Err., IV.v.53), how Othello ‘trembles’ before his trance (Oth., IV.i.37)—as the body, like the soul that has escaped it, is caught in a state of radical suspension. Thus the ecstatic experience leaves Venus trembling—she ‘trembles at his tale’; ‘trembles at th’ imagination’; ‘quak[es]’, ‘shake[s] and ‘shudder[s]’—and makes itself visible through a series of other physical markers:

\begin{verbatim}
Didst thou not mark my face? Was it not white?
Saw’st thou not signs of fear lurk in mine eye?
Grew I not faint, and fell I not down right?
Within my bosom whereon thou dost lie
    My boding heart pants, beats, and takes no rest,
    But like an earthquake shakes thee on my breast.
\end{verbatim}

(643-8, emphasis added)

Venus has taken Adonis’ words to heart, and her body responds accordingly. Just as Shakespeare elsewhere associates ecstasy with pulse, Venus’ pulse is disordered by the experience of being thrown beside herself. Like Leontes who suffers a tremor cordis (a trembling of the heart) in The Winter’s Tale, Venus ‘heart dances, but not for joy, not joy’ (WT, II.ii.109-10). This ‘panting and trembling of the heart’, notes physician Philip

\textsuperscript{97} Derrida, \textit{On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy}, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{98} Serres, \textit{The Five Senses}, p. 315.
Barrough, ‘is a corrupt motion of the heart, or a stretching of it against nature’. The heart that ‘pants, beats, and takes no rest’ is one that has stretched too far; willing to extend and send out her soul, Venus’ heart has followed suit. For the heart and the soul could be understood to expand and contract simultaneously; as some physicians believed, ‘the shaking pulse’ was a result of the soul causing the heart to ‘dilat[e]’ (or ‘stretch’ as we heard above) and contract as ‘the sides of the heart fall … down under their own weight’. The tremulous pulse is a result of this movement, this stretching out and contracting back, this ebb and flow; as Adonis’ ‘uncouple[s]’ (674) from Venus, she experiences this painful contraction ‘as the snail, whose tender horns being hit, shrinks back in his shelly cave with pain’ (1033-4). ‘Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream’ (‘Sonnet 129’, 12): ecstasy cannot last.

‘In ecstasy I would dissolving lie’: like those subjects who ‘dissolve in to ecstasy’, Venus trembles towards the edge of ‘dissolut[ion]’, willing to ‘melt’ (114). For just as she repeatedly sought to dilate and extend her time with Adonis, so too had she prepared for the dilatation of soul and self that the poetry of what Barbara Everett has described as the “ecstasy” tradition repeatedly promises; as it is in Lord Herbert’s ‘Ode upon a Question Moved’, ‘two joined can themselves dilate’. The ecstatic subject willingly dilates and extends itself in hope of losing itself in the beloved:

So can two persons propagate,
When singly either would decay.

So when from hence we shall be gone,
And be no more, nor you, nor I,

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100 Crooke, p. 401. Crooke, however, ultimately discredits these ideas, asserting the motion of the heart instead to be a ‘constant and orderly motion’, p. 401.
As one anothers mystery,
Each shall be both, yet both but one.\textsuperscript{102}

This is the kind of proximity and transcending of boundaries yearned for by Venus; open throughout the poem to the kind of exposure that ecstasy demands, we here find Venus ‘trembling on the edge of being’, to borrow Jean-Luc Nancy’s phrase. As Christopher Fynsk writes, echoing Nancy:

> The subject in love is a subject exposed—exposed (affected) by the other and opening to the other: opening further to its exposure, opening to further exposure. What it knows of love is this exposure … [it is] always a singular self coming to itself in the presence of the other, enjoying ‘itself’ only as the exposure to an alterity and the transport of this exposure.\textsuperscript{103}

Unlike Troilus in the previous section of this chapter, Venus is willing to lose distinction in these joys. ‘We’ll speak our thoughts in kisses | In which wee’le melt our soules, and mixe them so, | that what is thine or mine, there’s none shall know’: this is the kind of ‘lend and borrow’ (\textit{Ven.}, 961) of identity that Venus longs for, her soul waiting at her lips to be released in a ‘kiss [that] shall be thine own as well as mine’ (117).\textsuperscript{104} But that this ecstatic mingling can only be realised by the proximity that kisses demand ultimately proves fatal in Adonis’ hunt and, in the poem’s final stages, metaphors of the kiss as enacting a ‘little death’ are literalized as Venus imagines Adonis’ final moments: ‘If [the boar] did see [Adonis’] face, why then I know | He thought to kiss him, and hath killed him so’ (1109-10). Adonis dies upon a kiss. This is the closest the poem gets to the kind of sexualised union towards which so much of its action drives. Describing the boar’s ‘frothy mouth bepainted’ with ‘milk and blood … mingled together’ (901-2), Shakespeare casts this encounter between Adonis and the boar against the backdrop of the discourses

\textsuperscript{102} Edward Herbert, \textit{Occasional Verses}, p. 66.
explored in the previous section of this chapter which understood male seed as ‘a permixtion of the blood and spirits’. This ‘expense of spirit’ has, as Donne warned, come at a deathly cost. This was not the consummation devoutly wished for, and Venus’ ‘heavy anthem … concludes in woe’ (839).

Kisses proliferate throughout Shakespeare’s poem, from those that are kind to those that can kill, to those that can be extended and contracted and alter a subject’s perception of time accordingly. As both a site of physical incorporation and metaphysical interaction—drawing together bodies and souls alike—the kiss has the potential to enact ecstatic fulfilment. What Venus’ kisses reveal throughout the poem is the desire for an alternative temporality, one that can liberate these subjects from the restraints of linear time; like the discussions of pulse that opened this chapter, the kiss facilitates a state of distempering extremis, capable of propelling subjects out-of-body and throwing them out of time. But, as we have seen, hopes of ecstatic petite mort are always tinged with the threat of death; just as kisses offer a foretaste of pleasures to come, ecstasy can only offer a glimpse at a moment of union that, for now, cannot be sustained. And yet as Adonis ‘melts’ (1164) into ‘the field’s chief flower’ (1168), Venus makes one final attempt to keep him close:

Lo, in this hollow cradle take thy rest,
My throbbing heart shall rock thee day and night;
There shall not be one minute in an hour
Wherein I will not kiss my sweet love’s flower.

(1185-8)

‘There shall not be one minute in an hour’ without a hopeful kiss. But as she takes up the ‘crop[ped]’ (1175) flower ‘to wither in [her] breast’ (1182) in the poem’s climax, we are presented with a state of ecstasy that even Venus must acknowledge cannot last, for death hovers in the margins. Like kisses, ecstasy occupies a liminal space, an in-between, a

105 Crooke, p. 278.
threshold between life and death, a temporary, suspended state that, for Venus, is worth holding on to.
III. ‘A THING LIKE DEATH’: SYNCOPATED STATES IN ROMEO AND JULIET

Sincopation is when the striking of Time falls to be in the midst of a Semibrief or Minum, or as they are termed, Notes driven till the time falls even again.\textsuperscript{106}

Physical time never stops. That may be, but syncope seems to accomplish a miraculous suspension.\textsuperscript{107}

Let us return for a moment to Venus’ swoon. ‘Believing she is dead’, Adonis tries to revive the goddess, taking her wrist in his hand and ‘hold[ing] her pulse hard’.\textsuperscript{108} As Adonis continues his attempts to rouse Venus—though to kiss her, as we have seen, will be only his last resort—we are momentarily invited to question whether or not Adonis feels a pulse beneath his fingers. As he turns to the body with urgency, variously touching her cheeks, nose, wrist, and lips, Adonis looks for outward, corporeal signs of Venus’ internal state. In this, Adonis shares the preoccupation of the early modern physician who sought to understand the complexities of the heart and pulse: how it worked; how it could be measured; how it could alter and be altered. As Crooke asserts, considering ‘the motions of the Heart and the Arteries or Pulse’: ‘by what engines and pullies, what poyses and counter-poyses, what affluencies and refluencies this perpetuity [of the heart beating continually] be accomplished, we imagine will neither be unprofitable nor unpleasant to understand’.\textsuperscript{109} Before William Harvey brought to light the workings of the body’s circulatory system, Galen already had his finger on the pulse, and those informed by his work identified clear relationships between pulse and emotion.\textsuperscript{110} In this sense, what


\textsuperscript{107} Clément, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{108} Karim-Cooper tells us that pulse holding means ‘wrist grasping’, The Hand on the Shakespearean Stage, p. 125.

\textsuperscript{109} Crooke, p. 400.

\textsuperscript{110} Thomas Aquinas, for example, argues that the relationship between pulse and emotion could cut both ways, asserting that emotions such as anger were not just accompanied by a quickening of the pulse, but could also be partially constituted by it. See Emotion and Cognitive Life in Medieval and Early Modern Philosophy, ed. Martin Pickavé and Lisa Shapiro (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 171-196.
Adonis feels beneath his fingers could tell him more than whether or not Venus is alive. But this all depends, of course, on Adonis knowing what exactly he should be feeling for: the body’s internal rhythms could reveal a great deal, but measuring and interpreting them with accuracy was no straightforward endeavour. As Moshenska notes in his study of touch, ‘Galen claimed that feeling the pulse involved not simply counting beats: his method was emphatically qualitative rather than quantitative, and, he explained, physicians would have to arduously and incrementally hone their ability to feel’.111 My intention here is not to read Adonis as a physician, but rather to highlight another moment where Shakespeare draws attention to the pulse of the subject in the throes of extreme emotion, where attention to the pulse has the potential to reveal something about the internal states of these characters. From Hamlet, to Antipholus, to Venus, this chapter has observed ecstasy as an experience that registers itself on the body. More specifically, it has begun to unpack Shakespeare’s association between ecstasy and pulse rate. Continuing its exploration of ecstasy as an experience that, as Hamlet had it, does not ‘temperately keep time’, the remainder of this chapter pays attention to these internal rhythms, be they regular or disrupted.

i) MEASURING THE OFF-BEAT: DESIRE’S DISsonANT PULSE

‘By the pulse it is possible to know a passionate lover’, observes Jacques Ferrand in his 1623 treatise on love sickness, Erotomania: ‘if you aske those that are in love, what part they are most affected in, they will all answer uno ore, their heart … the Heart is the true seat of Passionate love’.112 It follows, Ferrand observes, that when we experience different

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111 Moshenska, p. 288.  
112 Ferrand, p. 116.
emotions, our heart responds accordingly; ‘during the time of Feare, and Sadnesse’, he notes, ‘the Heart as it were contracts it selfe’, whereas ‘in Joy, & Hope, it seems to dilate and enlarge itself’.\textsuperscript{113} As emotion causes the heart to contract and dilate, the pulse quickens and slows, races and relaxes: motion and emotion are in this sense inextricably linked. One way to observe these varying pulses and to diagnose a patient, Galen tells his readers in his \textit{Pulse for Beginners}, is to measure the ‘intervals and impact’, for ‘it is in respect of this interval that a pulse may be “frequent”, “sparse”, or “medium”—which is the normal state for a pulse’.\textsuperscript{114} Put simply, the ‘normal state’ of the pulse accords to a ‘normal state’ of mind and health: a pulse that ‘temperately keep[s] time’ indicates a body that is well tempered, balanced, and regular. Citing Galen throughout, Ferrand refers his reader to the works of highly influential Persian physician Avicen (or Avicenna, c. 980-1037 AD), who writes of a ‘Passionate lover’ who, upon merely hearing the name of his beloved, would suffer ‘a strange alteration in the Motion of the Pulse’ which ‘will be very unequall, and often interrupted’.\textsuperscript{115} Observing for himself ‘the foolish dotings of a young scholar in the City, who was desperately gone in Love’, Ferrand finds that this holds true: ‘For she coming in at the instant as I was feeling his pulse, I perceived it suddenly vary in motion, and beat very unequally; he presently grew pale, and Blushed againe in a moment, and could hardly speak’.\textsuperscript{116} The lover’s pulse is characterized by its irregularity, for ‘Love’, as Ferrand will later conclude, echoing Shakespeare’s Rosalind, ‘is little better then mere Madnesse’.\textsuperscript{117}

On this matter Coeffeteau might agree, noting in his \textit{Table of Humane Passions} (1621) how the lover who ‘suffereth himselfe to bee so transported’ may well be subject

\footnotesize
\begin{enumerate}
  \item Ferrand, p. 78.
  \item Ferrand, p. 116.
  \item Ferrand, p. 116; 117-8.
  \item ‘Love’, according to Rosalind, ‘is merely a madness’ (\textit{Ayll}, III.ii.384).
\end{enumerate}
to ‘these extasies and ravishments’:

For that his soule that loves intirely, is perpetually imployed in the contemplation of the party beloved, and hath no other thoughts but of his merit, the heate abandoning the parts, and retiring into the braine, leaves the whole body in great distemperation, which corrupting and consuming the whole bloud, makes the face grow pale & wanne, causeth the trembling of the heart, breeds strange convulsions, and retires the spirits in such sort, as he seems rather an image of death, then a living creature.\textsuperscript{118}

Observing how the heart trembles, how the face grows pale, how the body convulses, Coeffeteau’s observations again demonstrate how ‘extasies’ could have profound physical consequences. Spending too much time contemplating the beloved—loving ‘not too wisely but too well’ as Othello would have it (\textit{Oth.}, V.i.342)—the subject is thrown into ‘great distemperation’ as heat, like the soul in ecstatic rapture, ‘abandon[s]’ the body: lover pines after beloved, and the body suffers the consequences. As Galen tells us, in ‘phrentis’—a state frequently conflated with the experience of the lover as we have heard—‘the pulse … has a certain wavelike quality … and will sometimes manifest the slightest tremor, at other times [it] appear[s] to be cut short as in convulsion’.\textsuperscript{119} ‘Cut short’ in this way, the heart’s rhythm becomes syncopated (late Latin \textit{sunkopē}—\textit{sūn} (with, together); \textit{kōptō} (to strike, beat, cut off)—from the Greek \textit{αὐγκόπη}), and with this sudden, temporary alteration, the subject is thrown into an uncertain period of dissonance. ‘Indeed’, Galen concludes, ‘the whole artery frequently appears to leave its proper place and move upward’.\textsuperscript{120} Just as the early modern physician understood the tremulous heart as being caused by the action of stretching out and contracting back, Galen uses these terms to articulate the pulse’s tremor: ‘the motion is uneven, as the artery is moved up and down like a string … the artery appears to leap outwards then again to contract

\textsuperscript{118} Nicholas Coeffeteau, \textit{Table of Human Passions} (London: by Nicholas Okes, 1621), p. 169; 170-1.
\textsuperscript{119} Galen, p. 340.
\textsuperscript{120} Galen, p. 340.
inside’. If ‘love is little better than mere Madnesse’, as Ferrand observed, it is the pulse that helps verify that likeness. In ‘these extasies and ravishments’, the subject’s body attempts to abandon, ‘retire’, or ‘lease’ itself, and those that ‘suffereth [them]selves to bee so transported’ experience ‘a thing like death’ (Rom., IV.i.74). What these considerations of the pulse demonstrate is that the lover occupies a different time scheme, one that medical thinkers sought to regulate, and bring back to a healthy cadence. And yet, as we shall see, for Romeo and Juliet, there is value to be located in the off-beat.

As the speaker of ‘Sonnet 147’ has it, ‘desire is death’: desire is deathly and death is something to be desired. That which Venus and poets such as William Drummond earlier described as the ‘lively joy’ of ‘living death’ is, in these circumstances, dangerously literalized: desire leaves the subject seeming, in Coeffeteau’s terms, ‘rather an image of death, then a living creature’. ‘Desire is death’: once again death hovers in the margins of loving and sexual experience. More than any of his characters, it is of course Shakespeare’s ‘death-marke’d love[rs]’ (Rom., 1.0.9) who feel this most keenly: ‘A pair of star-cross’d lovers [who] take their life … [and] with their death bury their parent’s strife’ (6; 8). Their ‘end’ (11) pronounced before the play has properly begun, Romeo and Juliet in some crucial sense embody this ‘living death’. As Jonathan Dollimore notes, ‘that [Romeo and Juliet] is a play about the paradoxical binding together of desire and death is clear enough’, and we find throughout the text just how proximate those experiences can be; this is a play where lovers too often seem ‘rather an image of death, then a living creature’.

Besotted with Rosaline, for instance, Romeo laments that ‘she hath forsworn to love’, a vow that drives him to despair—‘do I live dead that live to tell it now’—and

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121 Galen, p. 342.
122 These are Cleopatra’s sentiments in her final moments: ‘the stroke of death is as a lover’s pinch | Which hurts and is desired’ (Ant., V.ii.293-4).
throws him beside himself: ‘Tut, I have lost myself; I am not here; | This is not Romeo, he’s some other where’ (I.i.223-4; 197-8). ‘I live dead’: life without Rosaline is, for Romeo, a ‘living death’, and it is between those paradoxical extremes that Romeo has ‘lost [him]self’. In a play that repeatedly situates its characters at these extremes, it follows that they announce themselves as being ‘born to die’, and find that ‘life, living, all is Death’s’ (III.iv.4; IV.iv.66). Furthermore, that the play understands desire as an experience that trembles between life and death is signalled by the tragedy’s leitmotiv of death as Juliet’s bridegroom; ‘my grave is like to be my wedding bed’, announces Juliet after meeting Romeo for the first time, a mingling of sex and death that she will later be driven to crave—‘Death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead’—and demand: ‘make the bridal bed | In that dim monument where Tybalt lies’ (I.iv.248; III.ii137; III.v.200-1). To revise slightly the claim of ‘Sonnet 147’, then, ‘desire is [a living] death’ and, like the kisses in the previous section, the play brings its lovers to this dangerous threshold.

ii) KEEPING TIME: VERONA’S ESTABLISHED HRTYHMS

Enter Juliet, somewhat fast, and embraceth Romeo (II.vi.15 s.d.): this stage direction from Q1 is in many ways symptomatic of the lovers’ tempo as they repeatedly rush towards the moment of embrace. Meeting for the first time, the pair are quickly drawn into proximity as the lines of their shared sonnet thread them closer and closer together like the twisting eye-beams of Donne’s lovers. Coming together in a ‘tender kiss’ (I.iv.209) and drawn apart by the Nurse’s interruption (223), Romeo and Juliet are repeatedly driven to collapse the distance between them that society demands be maintained. For ‘fair Verona, where we lay our scene’ (I.0.2) is, after all, a single state divided by an ‘ancient grudge’

and the force dynamics that the lovers feel in these moments are at the heart of the play's central tension that sees the ‘rebellious subjects’ (I.i.77) of the two houses repeatedly drawn into dangerous proximity: ‘three civil brawls … have thrice disturbed the quiet of [Verona’s] streets’ (85; 87), laments the Prince as he steps in to end the fight that erupts between Montagues and Capulets in the play’s opening scene. These tensions can be felt in the text from the outset, as the play’s poetic structure moves characters together and apart:

\[\text{Draw thy tool, here comes the house of Montagues.}\]

\[\text{…}\]

\[\text{Draw if you be men. … remember thy washing blow.}\]

\[\text{They fight.}\]

\[\text{Part fools, put up your swords.}\]

(Li.30; 58; 60, emphasis added, speakers omitted)

The swordplay in these moments establishes the force dynamics of Romeo and Juliet, as characters are repeatedly drawn together—‘Draw … Draw’—and come to ‘blow[s]’, before ultimately being ‘part[ed]’. Indeed, this pattern is repeated moments later:

\[\text{Put up thy sword}\]

\[\text{…}\]

\[\text{Have at thee, coward.}\]

\[\text{They fight.}\]

(64; 68, speakers omitted)

There is, I am suggesting, a kind of music to these carefully orchestrated encounters, a ‘music in the blades’ to borrow J. Allen Suddeth’s assertion of ‘the rhythmic patterns’ of fight sequences in Fight Directing for the Theatre. ‘Draw … Draw … fight … Part’: the play emphasises the strong beats; it accentuates these rhythms.\(^ {125} \)

And so where Juliet is drawn towards Romeo, her cousin, ‘the fiery Tybalt’ (105), feels the negative counter-force just as strongly; if not already on stage with ‘his sword

prepared’ (105), the mere sound of an enemy voice is enough to set his fingers twitching: ‘This, by his voice, should be a Montague. | Fetch me my rapier, boy’ (I.iv.167-8). With Romeo and Juliet coming together as Tybalt is simultaneously driven away by Capulet— ‘go to! … Go to! … Go to, go to … you are a pincox, go’ (190; 191; 195; 199)—the play keeps the space between Montague and Capulet heavily charged, repeatedly bringing the two into close proximity only to rend them apart. It is in that interim that passion and violence are suspended and intensified, for, as the Friar famously warns, ‘these violent delights have violent ends, | And in their triumph die like fire and powder, | Which as the kiss consume’ (II.v.9-11). Like ‘gun-powder [or ‘touch powder’] which is presently set on fire by the lest touch of a sparke that is put unto it’, we see how ‘a fire sparkling in lovers’ eyes’ (I.i.191) can prove just as dangerous as coming into contact with the ‘fiery Tybalt’: safe distance ought to be kept from both.126 From the ‘fire of [the two houses]’ pernicious rage’ (I.i.82) to Romeo’s ‘fire-eyed fury’ (III.i.125) that will bring about Tybalt’s demise—an encounter which the Friar will later similarly describe as being ‘like powder in a skitless soldier’s flask’ and ‘set afire by [Romeo’s] own ignorance’ (III.iii.131-2)—the play repeatedly articulates these explosive encounters through apt metaphors. Just like a kiss that draws lovers into the dangerous proximity of ‘lips on lips’ (V.ii.120), the feuding houses are repeatedly drawn to hand-to-hand violence. Romeo and Juliet dramatizes the tension of two parties being pulled towards the ‘incorporat[ion]’ of two in one’ (Rom., II.vi.37), where being within touching distance is to feel the explosive potential.

Verona, therefore, is out of sync, and in the midst of it all Romeo and Juliet find themselves trying to locate harmony within dissonance. But achieving this is no straightforward endeavour. As Descartes explains in his Compendium of Musick (1653):

*Diminuation* is when against one Note of one part, are set 2. or 4. or more in another; in which this order ought to be kept, that the First make a Consonance with a Note of another part, but the Second, if it be only one Degree distant from

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the former, may make a Dissonance.\textsuperscript{127}

If order is kept, the result is consonance; if lost, then comes dissonance. In Verona, as we have seen, consonance and harmonious rhythm is only achievable through maintaining the correct distance: as the play’s opening brawl makes clear—‘strike, beat them down! | Down with the Capulets, down with the Montagues!’ (I.i.69-70)—and as the Friar warned, proximity is dangerous. Just as Galen stressed in his instructions for measuring the beats of the pulse, the interval is significant—‘the space of time between … impacts’—and the Prince demands it be maintained: ‘If ever you disturb our streets again, | Your lives shall pay the forfeit of the peace’ (92-3).\textsuperscript{128} Offering an example (figure 2), Descartes demonstrates how dissonance is brought about when a note is ‘moved by degrees’, when notes fall out of their correct place, and the ‘\textit{Syncopa}’ that occurs as a consequence of ‘one voice’ being heard at the same time as ‘the beginning of one other Note of an advers \[sic\] part’.\textsuperscript{129}

\textbf{Figure 2.} A stave demonstrating an example of musical syncopation—René Descartes, \textit{Compendium of Musick} (London, 1653)

\textsuperscript{127} René Descartes, \emph{Renatus Des-Cartes Excellent Compendium of Musick} (London: by Thomas Harper, 1653), p. 53.
\textsuperscript{128} Galen, p. 326.
\textsuperscript{129} Descartes, \textit{Compendium of Musick}, p. 54.
What we hear, he explains, is simultaneously the consonance between certain notes, and dissonances caused by disrupted intervals:

Yea, the Variety of these doth cause, that the Consonances, among which they are set, are heard more distinctly, and also excite more constant attention. For, when the Dissonance $BC$ is heard, the expectation of the ear is encreased, and the judgement of the Symphony somewhat suspended, until the Tune shall arrive at the Note $D$, in which it more satisfies the Hearing; and yet more perfectly in the Note $E$, with which, after the end of the Note $D$, hath kept up the attention, the Note $F$, instantly supervenient doth make an exquisite Consonance. … And, indeed, therefore are these Consonances used in Cadences; because what hath been the longer expected, doth the more please when it comes: and therefore the sound, after a Dissonance heard, doth better acquiesce in a most perfect Consonance, or Unison.\footnote{Descartes, Compendium of Musick, p. 54.}

Like the ‘exquisite mingling’ understood to take place during sexual encounter—where the womb exquisitely sought out male seed—the syncopated rhythm similarly seeks out ‘exquisite consonance’. The result of this interplay between consonance and dissonance, syncope, as Descartes describes it, is the product of anticipation (a note that strikes early) and delay (a note that is held off) in order to ‘excite … constant attention’ and ‘expectation’, keeping auditors ‘somewhat suspended’ until the arrival of the note which can return everything to ‘perfect … unison’. The prologue to Romeo and Juliet makes a promise along similar lines, establishing the play’s central rhythm:

From forth the fatal lions of these two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life,
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents’ strife.
The fearful passage of their death-marked love,
And the continuance of their parents’ rage—
Which but their children’s end naught could remove—
Is now the two hours’ traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

(I.0.5-14)

Acknowledging Verona’s dissonant state and the long-established rhythm of these ‘two
foes’, the Chorus entreats that what follows be ‘attend[ed]’ with ‘patient ears’, as discord moves through to concord: ‘a pair of star-crossed lovers … with their death bury their parents’ strife’. As it stretches and contracts, extends ‘forth’ and ‘take[s]’ back, the prologue ebbs and flows from ‘life’ and ‘death’, ‘fearful passage’ to ‘death-marked love’, ‘continuance’ to ‘end’. What governs this two-way flow is a compulsion to gesture ahead to the ‘end’, while also attending to the ‘now’ and ‘here’: to open up the ‘two hour’ pocket of time between present moment and deathly end. In Descartes’ terms, as we enter into a ‘Symphony somewhat suspended’, we are reassured that the lovers’ deaths will provide the final, unifying beat, and that ‘the Tune shall arrive at … perfect Consonance, or Unison’. To appropriate Catherine Clément’s analysis of syncope—which shares this study’s interest in moments of self-absentation, and which will run throughout what follows—‘it is essential for the beat to change register, and it is syncope’, or, in the following reading, Shakespeare’s syncopated subjects, ‘that does the work’.\textsuperscript{131}

Consonance, in both Descartes’ example and Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, is only achievable after the fact, ‘supervenient[ly]’ (to come [venīre] on top of [super]); unison between the two households, in other words, is only achievable after a period of ecstatic dissonance, a disruption of order. The harmonics of true love and of Verona are achievable only once the dissonant rhythms of Petrarchan love and civil war have been played out. What we get in Romeo and Juliet, I will demonstrate, is an attempt to achieve harmonics. In anticipation of this end, it is syncope that governs the interim. ‘From delay to anticipation’, notes Clément, ‘that is the very movement of musical syncope’.\textsuperscript{132} On the one hand syncope ‘creates delay and accentuates it by prolonging time’: on the other, it seems to ‘make things go quickly, it accelerates’. To be ‘somewhat suspended’ in syncope is, as we shall see, to be caught in this dissonant interim.

\textsuperscript{131} Clément, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{132} Clément, p. 81.
‘Love, the most perfect of syncopes, starts with love at first sight. A shared syncope’. Clément, p. 16.

From their first meeting, Romeo and Juliet find themselves in a relationship that operates at high speed, thrown into a whirlwind where every action risks being ‘too rash … too sudden’ (II.i.161); ‘wisely and slow’, the Friar feels impelled to caution, ‘they stumble that run fast’ (II.ii.94). But with Juliet ‘quickly won’ (II.i.138) and Rosaline ‘so soon forsaken’ (II.ii.67), Romeo finds himself ‘stand[ing] on sudden haste’ (93) and overtaken with an intensity of emotion that not only displaces Rosaline—‘I have forgot that name and that name’s woe’ (II.ii.46)—but will also lead him to throw off and reform his identity: ‘I’ll be new baptized: | Henceforth I never will be Romeo’ (II.i.93-4). If love for Rosaline brought out Romeo’s Petrarchan tendencies, Juliet divorces him from those conventions:

| ROMEO | Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin is purg’d. |
| JULIET | Then have my lips the sin that they have took. |
| ROMEO | Sin from my lips? O trespass sweetly urged! Give me my sin again. |

He kisses her.

| JULIET | You kiss by th’ book. |

(Liv.220-3)

Having just shared a sonnet, Juliet now disrupts the rhythm of their musical call-and-response, rejecting structural artifice and inherited language, and instead turning the line back towards Romeo. ‘You kiss by th’ book’: what Juliet desires is authentic experience. As she guides him away from the artificial and establishes a different tonal key, this is Romeo’s first indication that the music will be different with Juliet. ‘What a change is here!’, marvels the Friar: ‘art thou changed?’ (II.ii.65; 79). This change, Romeo admits, is one that occurred suddenly; ‘I have been feasting with mine enemy’, he tells the Friar, ‘where on the sudden one hath wounded me | That’s by me wounded’ (49-50). Such
sudden changeability is, as French physician André Du Laurens observes, typical of the loving subject: ‘his heart doth alwaies quake, and his pulse keepeth not true course, it is little, unequall, and beating thicke, changing it selfe upon the sudden’.134 Desire for Juliet takes hold of Romeo forcefully, and ‘on the sudden’. This suddenness often accompanies the ecstatic experience: seeming to position itself outside of time, leaving those who experience it collecting themselves from the sensation of being thrown, the sudden marks a moment of radical departure. That these lovers’ are ecstatically dislocated from the play’s time scheme by their ‘sudden’ romance is something the pair seem acutely aware of throughout the play, from Romeo’s awareness of how the present hangs over the future—‘this day’s black fate on more days doth depend; | This but begins the woe others must end’ (III.i.119-20)—to Juliet’s sudden vision of Romeo in his grave:

JULIET O God, I have an ill-divining soul! Methinks I see thee now, thou art so low, As one dead in the bottom of a tomb. Either my eyesight fails, or thou look’st pale. (III.v.54-7)

With this sudden vision, Juliet’s ‘ill-divining soul’ anticipates the ‘future in the instant’ (Mac., I.v.55), and puts her momentarily out of sync with both present and future; experiencing a kind of *contretemps* or ‘counter-time’ as Jacques Derrida would have it, Juliet finds herself ‘out of time’ like a musical note that pulses ahead of the sequence of beats.135 Ecstasy has thus far been understood as a foretaste of death, and Juliet’s vision, offering a glimpse of Romeo’s fate, a moment of little death, is no different. Like the song of the lark that interrupts and cuts short the lovers’ time together—‘she divideth us’ (Rom., III.v.30), laments Juliet—this vision is ‘out of tune, | Straining hard discords and unpleasing sharps’ (27-8). After all, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau later confirms in *A Complete

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Dictionary of Music (1779), ‘every syncopated note is in countertime, and every collection of syncopated notes is a movement in counter time’. Getting ahead of herself, Juliet temporarily throws the narrative into dissonance. As Clément observes: ‘That is the function of a short syncope: a sudden flight into nonexistent time’.

This sense of feeling out of sync with the diegetic time of the play is not isolated. Indeed, that the pair experience time differently to those around them is clear in moments where their ‘sudden haste’ is met with intense delay. As the couple seek to collapse the distance between them—‘he … leap’d this orchard wall’; ‘leap to these arms’; ‘Give me my Romeo’ (II.i.5; III.ii.7, 21)—they lament the expanses of time that seem determined to keep them apart: ‘Be fickle, fortune, | For then I hope thou wilt not keep him long, | But send him back’ (III.v:62-4). Claims that ‘love’s heralds should be thoughts, | Which ten times faster glides than the sun’s beams’ (II.v:4-5), or fantasies of immediate communication via ‘nimble-pinioned doves’, ‘wind-swift Cupid wings’, or ‘youthful’ nurses as ‘swift in motion as a ball’ (7; 9; 12-3), are met with experiences of delay, and what should take ‘half an hour’ (2) is stretched to ‘three long hours’ (11) as Juliet eagerly awaits to receive word from Romeo. It is in this way that the drama keeps the lovers suspended in states of anticipation and delay, where things not only take longer than they should, but where the couple experience passages of time that feel longer:

JULIET What o’clock tomorrow Shall I send to thee?

ROMEO By the hour of nine.

JULIET I will not fail; ‘tis twenty year till then.

(II.i.213-5)

In these hours there are ‘twenty year[s]’ and, as Juliet later laments, ‘in a minute there are many days’ (III.v:45). It is in this way that the play carries through Romeo’s early

137 Clément, p. 27.
sense of time as elastic, which, like the lover’s tremulous pulse, is able to both stretch and contract:

BENVOLIO   Good morrow, cousin.
ROMEO      Is the day so young?
BENVOLIO   But new strook nine.
ROMEO      Ay me, sad hours seem long …
BENVOLIO   … What sadness lengthens Romeo’s hours?
ROMEO      Not having that which, having, makes them short.

(Li.156-60)

‘Sadness lengthens Romeo’s hours’, happiness shortens them. Accordingly, the couple find that time seems to go quickly when they are together, and slowly when they apart. For David Houston Wood, Romeo here articulates ‘a subjective truism’: ‘as individuals boasting our own respective agencies … [we] are inherently familiar with our own subjective impressions of time and temporal experience across a range of our daily activities and affective states’. As Carson observes: ‘the experience of eros is a study in the ambiguities of time … temporally, the world stands to you in a somewhat perverse relation, permanent and transient at once as it is’. Indeed, Romeo and Juliet are not unique: for Hero and Leander, time similarly seems to expand and contract as ‘each minute [spent apart] seems … a tedious day’ and ‘time stands still’, compared to the ‘kind melting hours’ in the arms of the beloved; or, as it is in Venus and Adonis, ‘lover’s hours are long, though seeming short’ (842). And yet there does seem to be something distinctive about Romeo and Juliet’s response to time, and their acute sense that their experiences contradict time’s natural progress; ‘there are in the play’, argues Joseph S. M. J. Chang, ‘two schemes of time, that of the real world … and that measured by the lovers’. This

139 Carson, p. 117; 121.
is not to suggest that the lovers throw off altogether ‘chronological time, the pulse of the public world’, to borrow David Lucking’s phrase, but rather that they are attentive to the extent to which their experience of time is slightly out of sync: that they reside, as it were, on the off-beat. This ecstasy of love, this shared syncope as Clément would have it, has made irregular the pulse of their existence, and the lovers flatly refuse the early modern physician’s advice that they regulate it.

The lovers therefore occupy an interim between their feuding houses: a syncopated off-beat that goes against Verona’s established rhythm. But, as Romeo discovers just hours after the Friar has ‘incorporate[d] two in one’ (II.v.37) and made official his union with Juliet, this interim is dangerous, and cannot be maintained. For as the two houses are once again drawn into proximity in Act Three, Scene One, the space between them is once again charged with dangerous tension: ‘Tybalt, Mercutio’, Romeo warns, ‘the Prince expressly hath | Forbid this bandying in Verona streets’ (86-87).

Having ‘doff[ed] his name’ (II.ii.49) and shrugged off his identity as a ‘Montague’ in order to marry a Capulet, Romeo finds himself uncomfortably positioned between the two houses both figuratively—‘good Capulet, which name I tender | as dearly as my own, be satisfied’ (III.i.70-1)—and literally: ‘why the devil came you between us?’ laments Mercutio, ‘I was hurt under your arm’ (102-3). In both senses, Romeo is ‘twixt’ (167) Tybalt and Mercutio, and so embodies the interim, figuring a disrupted interval that poses a threat to Verona’s long-established order. But the tune of this ‘ancient grudge’ (I.0.3) cannot be thrown off so easily, and the rhythms of the play are carried over, audible on the striking of a single strong beat: *Tybalt stabs Mercutio under Romeo’s arm* (88 s.d.).

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143 In her discussion of *coda duello*, fight director Colleen Kelly offers a reading of the rhythms and movements of this scene—*Figuring the Fight: Recovering Shakespeare’s Theatrical Sword-play*, in *Theatre and Violence*, ed. John W. Frick (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1999), pp. 96-
Tybalt strikes through the off-beat, and Mercutio’s ‘untimely death’ (118) comes at the hands of a character who notoriously ‘keeps time’ (II.iii.20): as Mercutio observed earlier, Tybalt ‘rests his minim rests, one, two, and the third in your bosom’ (20-2). Going against those who keep time in Verona can have fatal consequences, Mercutio learns, and it is in revenging his death and killing Tybalt that Romeo discovers the same: ‘let Romeo hence in haste, | Else, when he is found, that hour is his last’ (194-5). Forced to depart Verona in haste, Romeo is once again thrown out of sync: to keep time in Verona now would be deadly.\footnote{Romeo and Juliet’s time is, by contrast, repeatedly articulated as being beyond: ‘till we can find a time | To blaze your marriage’ (III.iii.149-50); ‘sweet discourses in our time to come’ (III.v.53); emphasis added.}

And so, just as Kiernan Ryan understands ‘words’ to be ‘the chains that bind the lovers to the sexual norms and social imperatives of Verona’—a language system which the lovers ‘struggle to free themselves from’—time similarly places its own constraints on the couple; like Ryan’s description of ‘the weight of words’, there is a temporal ‘gravity that pins individuals to involuntary lives’.\footnote{Kiernan Ryan, \textit{Shakespeare} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 76; 79.} The play is driven by the fantasy of an alternative temporality, one where ‘passion lends [these lovers] power, time means, to meet | Tempering extremities with extreme sweet’ (II.0.13-4), and where the ecstasy of love can cut Romeo and Juliet loose from the rhythm and ‘pulse of the public world’. This is what syncope etymologically offers: a chance to cut oneself off. But that chance seems unavailable in a world so conscious of time that Juliet’s Nurse ‘can tell her age unto the hour’ (I.ii.12), and where, for Juliet, there is seemingly little time to break free of those chains:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAPULET</th>
<th>But soft—what day is this?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PARIS</td>
<td>Monday, my lord.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPULET</td>
<td>Monday! Ha ha! Well, Wednesday is too soon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Thursday let it be, a”Thursday, tell her,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She shall be married to this noble earl.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

108.
Will you be ready? Do you like this haste?

(III.iv.18-22)

‘Insisting on the peremptory rhythms of chronological and calendric time’, Lucking observes, Capulet here asserts the time that must be obeyed, must be kept. And so with Capulet having ‘sorted out a sudden day of joy’ (III.v.109), ‘the time [becomes] … very short’ (IV.i.1), and the narrative is hastily thrown into quick-time. Thus Juliet is left to ‘wonder at this haste’ (118), the Friar learns ‘the reason of this haste’ (15), and Capulet busily ‘hastes [the] marriage’ (11): ‘Make haste, make haste … Hie, make haste, make haste … Make haste I say!’ (IVii.15; 25-6). But the time scheme that once circumscribed the lovers can no longer contain them; unwilling to keep her father’s pace, Juliet, like Romeo, looks to deviate from the narrative’s accelerated tempo by throwing herself into a syncopated interval.

iv) JULIET’S LITTLE DEATH

This chapter has thus far understood the ecstatic ‘little death’ as a means to facilitate union with the beloved, where departure from self is understood as a requisite step towards achieving union with the other, and where the loving subject longs to die in, and be revived by, the other. It is this reciprocal death that Juliet anticipates as she muses on the explosive potential of the ‘amorous rites’ she has ‘not yet enjoyed’:

Come night, come Romeo, come thou day in night;
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
Whither than new snow upon a raven’s back.
Come gentle night, come loving black-browed night,
Give me my Romeo; and when I shall die,
Take him and cut him out in little stars,
And he will make the face of heaven so fine,
That all the world will be in love with night,
And pay no worship to the garish sun.

(III.ii.8; 28; 17-25)

146 Lucking, p. 81.
‘When I shall die…’: this starry, orgasmic little death is the kind of ecstasy Juliet wanted, the kind of authentic experience that could never be achieved by doing things ‘by the book’. ‘There are few words to describe’ this experience, asserts Clément, and they are ‘always the same ones: ‘explosion, eruption, earthquake, ascent, rending, bursting, vertigo, and the stars’. For Juliet, this is what it means to be ‘blasted with ecstasy’ (Ham., III.i.160); conflating death with starry petite mort, anticipating a death both little and literal, Juliet understands sexual ecstasy as an experience that touches death in an exciting way.

The bedroom in Romeo and Juliet becomes a syncopated space, one that makes available the positive experiences of loving ecstasy as this chapter has understood it thus far: here lovers are united by a mutual, loving death; here time temporarily stands still. Like Donne’s lovers in ‘The Sunne Rising’, Romeo and Juliet chide the ‘unruly Sunne’ that calls ‘through windowes, and through curtained’ and seek to escape the ‘rags of time’ (1; 3; 10). As they are pulled towards morning—as clouds ‘sever’ and day ‘stands on tiptoes’ (8; 10)—the lovers ‘will’ (24) this syncopated moment to last: ‘it is not yet near day’. Juliet professes, ‘It was the nightingale, and not the lark, | That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear … Yon light is not daylight’ (Rom., III.v.1-3;12). Holding on to these final few moments together, all is suspended, and Romeo’s fate hangs in the balance: ‘I must be gone and live, or stay and die’. The syncope—lasting for as long as the bird call remains undecided, until light creeps in through the window—dilates the comma between these opposing destinies, but ultimately slips away as day finally draws in. Romeo and Juliet may have experienced an authentic ecstasy, but by nature that experience can only ever be temporary.

In a play where loving paradox has the potential to become violent conflict—where ‘palm to palm’ (I.v.99) so readily becomes, as we have seen, hand-to-hand

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violence—these little deaths have the potential to be actualized. ‘I long to die’ (66) asserts Juliet in distress—‘past hope, past care, past help’ (45)—as she laments the prospect of marrying Paris ‘on Thursday next’ (49). As she runs through a series of preferred alternatives, from ‘leap[ing] … off the battlements of any tower’ to being ‘chain[ed] … with roaring bears’ (77-80), it seems Juliet really would ‘rather [die] than marry Paris’ (77). Death is, it seems, for Juliet the only means of escape. It is in these circumstances that Friar Lawrence offers an alternative:

If rather than to marry County Paris
Thou hast the strength of will to slay thyself,
Then it is likely thou wilt undertake
A thing like death to chide away this shame,
That cop’st with death himself to scape from it
And if thou darest, I’ll give thee remedy.

(Rom., IV.i.71-5)

Proposing ‘a thing like death’, the Friar offers a thing that comes into contact with ‘death himself’ (OED, ‘cope’, v. 2—to strike, to encounter), in order to ‘[e]scape from it’. This syncope is, in other words, a little death that copes (encounters) death. Indeed, just as the musical syncope interrupts a rhythm, the early modern period understood syncope as a state which interrupts the natural progress of the body: ‘to fall into the Syncope’, considers French author and Catholic minister Jean Guillemand, ‘is to fall into death; for as death is a cessation from all action, and motion, so the Syncope interrupts all motion, and all the functions both of sense and life’.148 If the loving subject has thus far been described as made in ‘the image of death’, the ‘Synopes and Extasies which sometimes happen to Lovers’ once again situate these subjects at the dangerous threshold between life and death.149 Syncope, to borrow the Friar’s words, is ‘a thing like death’ but allows ‘escape’, and as such it offers to place the subject in a unique position: out of time, out of body,

148 Guillemand, p. 273.

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out of sync, and in the between. As Clément has it:

Syncope deceives death. In all ways. By delaying the weak beat, excessively prolonging time, and by making it disappear subjectively, it pretends to delay progress toward the biological conclusion. By crossing the limits of consciousness, it anticipates immortality. I leave the world, then I return to it. I die, but I do not die. I am placed between the two, between life and death, exactly in the between-the-two, refusing one and the other.\(^{150}\)

If attention to the play’s internal rhythms reveal Juliet and Romeo as syncopated subjects that establish themselves in the off-beat, against the rhythms of society, it is apt that Juliet should turn to syncope and embody the interval in order to—recalling Descartes’ terms—throw the symphony into suspension. What syncope offers is an escape from the rigours of time.

‘Take thou this vial, being then in bed, | And this distilling liquor drink thou off’ (\textit{Rom.}, IV.i.93-4): at odds with the narratives of amorous experience we have encountered thus far which saw ‘two soules Distilled into kisses, [which] through our lips | Doe make one spirit of love’, the ‘distilling liquor’ that will pass through Juliet’s lips promises not to dissolve her spirit into another, but rather to dissolve her prospective union to Paris.\(^{151}\) This is not an experience of symbiotic union or of loving exchange; this is a ‘dismal scene’ that Juliet ‘must act alone’ (IV.iii.19). Furthermore, this is an experience that disturbs the fine line that keeps the ecstatic subject from losing themselves irrecoverably in death. This is something that ecstasy shares with syncope—a state which is, in Clément’s terms, ‘an absence of the self … a “cerebral eclipse”, so similar to death that it is also called “apparent death”; it resembles its model so closely that there is a risk of never recovering from it’.\(^{152}\) Indeed, we are repeatedly encouraged to see Juliet’s experience as one that resides at these deathly limits, as Shakespeare dramatically literalizes the ‘living death’ that has echoed throughout this chapter. As the Friar assures her, this is not death, just a

\(^{150}\) Clément, pp. 260-1.


\(^{152}\) Clément, p. 1.
thing like it:

Tomorrow night look that thou lie alone;
Let not the Nurse lie with thee in thy chamber.
Take thou this vial, being then in bed,
And this distilling liquor drink thou off;
And presently through all thy veins shall run
A cold and drowsy humour, for no pulse
Shall keep his native progress, but surcease.
No warmth, no breath shall testify thou livest;
The roses in thy lips and cheeks shall fade
To wany ashes, thy eyes’ windows fall
Like death when he shuts up the day of life.
Each part, deprived of supple government,
Shall stiff and stark and cold appear like death;
And in this borrowed likeness of shrunk death
Thou shall continue two-and-forty hours
And then awake as from a pleasant sleep.

(91-106, emphasis added)

‘Like death … like death … like … death’. Describing how Juliet’s pulse will ‘surcease’ (from the French surseoir, to delay or suspend), the Friar explains that ‘this distilling liquor’ will allow Juliet to slip into suspension, a mimicked version of death; as her pulse slows to a pause, she too will enter into a state of intermission (OED, ‘surcease’, n. a) lasting, or at least meant to last, ‘two-and-forty hours’. With its capacity to ‘stiff’ Juliet’s body as it runs through her veins, the Friar’s ‘distilling liquor’ bears a likeness to the ‘leperous distilment’ that ‘courses through | The natural gates and alleys of King Hamlet’s body (Ham., I.v.64; 66-7). In both instances, Shakespeare takes us inside the body and gradually draws our focus outward: first, we understand how liquid makes its way into the body—‘this distilling liquor drink thou off’ (Rom., IV.i.94); ‘in the porches of my ears [he did] pour the leperous distilment’ (Ham., I.v.64)—and then we follow its progress ‘through all th[e] veins’ (Rom., IV.i.95) and ‘alleys of the body’ (Ham., I.v.67), moving gradually outward in order to witness its external effects. In Hamlet, this movement demonstrates the parity between ‘leprous distilment’ and resultant ‘lazar-like’ skin (to be ‘lazar-like’ is to be like
the leprous Lazarus in the Gospel of Luke).\textsuperscript{153} In the above passage from *Romeo and Juliet*, our attention is similarly redirected from the inside to the outside of the body, but with a more localized focus as we move out through the mouth where there is now ‘no breath’, before slowly settling our gaze on the face, panning outward from ‘lips’ to ‘cheeks’ to ‘eyes’. While Juliet will only undergo a ‘thing like death’, the likeness between these speeches and the comparable effects of these distillations on the body demonstrates just how incredibly like death this is; as Tanya Pollard notes, ‘the likeness [to death] is so persuasive that the distinction becomes uncomfortably blurred’.\textsuperscript{154}

Shakespeare inherits this uncomfortable blurring from his sources. Situating Juliet’s body at this threshold between life and death, Shakespeare echoes Arthur Brooke’s terms of ‘this temporary departure from self’ in *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* (1562):

\begin{quote}
Receve this vyoll small and kepe it as thine eye;
And on the marriage day, before the sunne do cleare the skye,
Fill it with water full up to the very brim,
Then drink it of, and thou shalt feel throughout eche vayne and lym
A pleasant slumber slyde, and quite dispred at length
On all thy partes, from every part reve all thy kindly strength;
Withouten moving thus thy ydle partes shall rest,
No pulse shall goe, ne hart once beate within thy hollow brest,
But thou shalt lye as she that dyeth in a traunce …
\end{quote}

‘No pulse shall goe, ne hart once beate’. In both texts, the potion has the same effect on the body: once drunk, the liquid will run through Juliet’s veins, stopping heart and pulse. In short, Juliet throws herself into what Clément would term a ‘miraculous suspension’, and these terms are similarly obeyed in William Painter’s *Palace of Pleasure* (1567):

\begin{quote}
Beholde héere I give you a viole which you shal kéepe as your owne propre heart, and the night before your mariage, or in the morning before day, you shall fil the
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{153} John Stow also points out the ‘Lazer house, for leprous people’ in Kentstreet in his *A Survaie of London* (London: by John Windet, 1598), p. 344.
\end{footnotes}
same up with water, & drink so much as is contained therein. And then you shall
féele a certain kinde of pleasant sleepe, which incroching by litle & litle all the
parts of your body, wil constrain thee in such wise, as unmovavble they shall
remaine: and by not doing their accustomed dueties, shall loose their natural
feelings, and you abide in such extasie the space of xl. houres at least without any
beating of poulse or other perceptible motion, which shall so astone them [tha]t
come to sée you, as they will judge you to be dead.\textsuperscript{156}

To read Shakespeare’s Juliet alongside her source-text counterparts is to understand the
suspended moment: what is for Shakespeare ‘a thing like death’, for Brooke ‘a traunce’,
and for Painter an ‘extasie’, is a radical suspension of body and soul engineered to last
for a set period of time. In her false death, Juliet, in other words, mimics the ecstatic
threshold. As Hamlet led us to expect, ‘in such extasie’ Juliet’s pulse does not ‘temperately
keep time’, nor does it play ‘healthful music’. Instead, as her pulse slows to an artificial
pause, set to remain that way for ‘the space of [forty] houres at least’, Juliet gives herself
over to a ‘time out’: an induced ecstatic little death that is more ‘like death’ than anything
we have encountered thus far. In this moment, Shakespeare follows his sources in order
to locate value in the experience of standing outside: of time, of self, of society. Unlike
death, this ecstasy does not offer a complete break: what it provides is temporary distance.
The subject who is willing to risk breaking ranks is aware of the risk—‘what if the mixture
do not work at all?’; ‘what if it be a poison … to have me dead’; ‘How if … I wake before
the time … ? That’s a fearful point (20; 23-4; 29-31)—but hopes they will be rewarded
with the prospect of a world outside of Verona’s patriarchal structures, outside of
Capulet’s seemingly inflexible time scheme: of a ‘world outside Verona walls’, after all
\textit{(Rom., III.iii.17)}.

Suspended in this death-like state, Juliet exhibits both the allures of, and anxieties
about, being in projection, of being thrown into the unknowable. But it is not only Juliet’s
anxieties that Shakespeare dramatizes, for beneath this plot device lie broader concerns

\textsuperscript{156} Clément, p. 5; William Painter, \textit{The Second Tome of the Palace of Pleasure} (London: by Henry
surrounding bodies that reside at this threshold between life and death. Indeed, in *Pericles*, we see characters driven to the threshold between life and death, and pulled back again. While *Pericles* repeatedly escapes death—despite claims that ‘instantly this prince must die’ (I.i.149) and narrowly avoiding a ‘watery grave’ (II.i.10)—his wife, Thaisa, is not so lucky as she ‘fall[s] into travail’ (III.0.52) and dies in labour at sea. Caught in a storm that ‘will not lie ’til the ship be cleared of the dead’ (III.i.48-9), *Pericles* is spurred into hasty action, aware that time is against him:

> Th’unfriendly elements  
> Forgot thee utterly, nor have I time  
> To give thee hallowed to thy grave, but straight  
> Must cast thee, scarcely coffined, in the ooze …  

(56-9)

And so it is that this ‘most wretched queen … must overboard straight’ (54; 53). But as ‘Lord Cerimon’ will discover—famed ‘through Ephesus’ (43) by those whom he has ‘restored’ (45) to health—‘they were too rough | That threw her in the sea’ (3.2.78-9). For as the ‘caulked and bitumed’ (57) chest is discovered ashore and its contents examined, Cerimon offers onlookers a glimmer of hope:

> Death may usurp on nature many hours  
> And yet the fire of life kindle again  
> The o’erpressed spirits. I heard of an Egyptian  
> That had nine hours lain dead, who was  
> By good appliance recovered.  

(81-5)

For Susanne Gosset, the passage here picks up ‘the play’s central concern with women who die and are revived’: women, in other words, who recover from a little death. To situate Thaisa, along with Juliet, against the backdrop of early modern medical treatises, we find that Cerimon’s tale is not simply a convenient plot device, but also reflects larger period anxieties concerning the legibility of bodies in these interim, trance states. As Crooke warns:

> It is impossible almost to perceive whether such women do yet live or no, and
doubtlesse many are buried in such fits (for they will last sometimes 24. houres or more, and the bodies growe colde and rigid like dead carkasses) who would recover if space were given.\footnote{157} The danger with these little deaths—at once the point and the tragedy in Juliet’s case—was that they could be taken for the real thing. What makes syncope dangerous for the Shakespearean subject is that it all too often opens up a space of uncertainty: an off-beat into which letters can fall and go undelivered; a moment of doubt into which an Iago can insert himself; an illegible body that is too quickly mis-read for dead. ‘In extasies and raptures,’ writes Alexander Ross in \textit{The Philosophical Touch-Stone}, ‘the body be without sense and motion, and seems as it were dead’.\footnote{158} Thaisa’s ‘fit’ here also seems to comply with Jean-Louis Guez Balzac’s philosophical considerations in \textit{The Prince} of a ‘kind … of Separation … by which the Soul is divided from the Body’, ‘consist[ing] in an entire benumbednesse of the spirits, and by a failing of the heart and breath, whereby people fall in a swoon’ akin to ‘those Extasies of Socrates, who remain’d sometimes from Sun-rising to Sunset, without moving at all’.\footnote{159} Upon the soul’s departure, the body is thrown into pause: no pulse, no breath, no motion. Anglican scholar Meric Casaubon makes clear just how problematic these states could be, recalling Tertullian’s ‘story of a Woman that stirred her arms when she was carried to be buried … but [because] it was looked upon a thing merely supernatural and miraculous’, the woman ‘was buried nevertheless’; ‘perchance’, Casaubon muses, if she had been ‘then taken up and well-tended, [she] might have recovered to perfect life, without a miracle’.\footnote{160} According to Casaubon, a number of physicians ‘agree’ that these curious little deaths could be ‘ground[ed] … upon certain experience’: ‘that a man in \textit{ecstasi melancholia}, or a woman in \textit{hysterica passione}, may

be gone three dayes, and come to themselves again’. Elsewhere, Edward Jordan offers a similar account of syncope as a state that could leave ‘all the faculties of the body fayling, it self lying like a dead corpse three or foure houres togethers, and sometimes two or three whole dayes without sense, motion, breath, heate, or any signe of life at all’. Or, as the Friar had it: ‘No warmth, no breath shall testify thou livest’. For an early modern audience, then, it would have been entirely plausible—although perhaps no less ‘strange’ or ‘most rare’ (105)—that the ‘entranced’ (93) Thaisa, like Juliet, could be mistaken for dead, and ‘by good appliance [be] recovered’:

Gentlemen, this queen will live. Nature awakes;  
A warmth breathes out of her! She hath not been  
Entranced above five hours. See how she ’gins  
To blow new life again.

(91-4)

Variousy dramatizing an experience able to last from five to forty-two hours, Shakespeare demonstrates just how ‘like death’ ecstasy can be. But, unlike death, ecstasy cannot last indefinitely: it can suspend time, but cannot hold it off forever. Indeed, we have heard throughout this study that ecstasy offers a foretaste of things to come, and to understand Juliet’s ‘thing like death’ in these terms is tragically apt. In this ‘pleasant sleep’, Shakespeare suspends Juliet in a state which Thomas Browne considers ‘a middle and moderating point betweene life and death’. To observe Juliet ecstatically asleep in her grave is to anticipate the truth in Browne’s assertion that ‘we tearme sleep a death, and yet it is the waking that kills us’.

But Browne would not approve of ‘this borrowed likeness of shrunk death’:

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161 Casaubon, p. 102.  
164 Browne, p. 85.
‘oblivion’, he asserts, ‘is not to be hired’.\(^{165}\) *Romeo and Juliet*, I would suggest, ultimately demands the same of ecstasy: this is an experience that should not be artificially replicated. To place Shakespeare’s Juliet alongside both her source-text counterparts and those who suffer ecstatic little deaths elsewhere in Shakespeare’s works and early modern culture more broadly, is to reveal that what Juliet experiences is not a state ‘like death’, but is more properly a state that mimics those death-like states: this is merely something *like* a ‘thing like death’. ‘Nature awakes’ in Thaisa, because this was a natural experience; she is ‘recovered’, brought back from the brink of death, and thus knows what it means to truly suffer ecstasy. What Juliet experiences is by contrast merely a ‘borrowed likeness’—a state that has not only been mediated through Shakespeare’s source-texts, but one that is also achieved artificially; it is the Friar’s ‘chemical intervention’, to borrow Pollard’s terms, that renders Juliet’s ecstatic experience inauthentic, unnatural, induced.\(^{166}\) For Thaisa, there is no guarantee that this state will only last ‘two-and-forty hours’, no guarantee of safe-return: this is a true habitation of the off-beat that Romeo and Juliet have elsewhere sought to achieve. What the Friar concocts, by contrast, is not ecstasy, merely ‘a thing like’ it. Where Thaisa’s natural ecstasy sees her inhabiting a syncopated state that will carry the play through to a comic resolution, the Friar’s version similarly envisages a state that will suspend Romeo and Juliet’s narrative ‘till … a time’ can be found to ‘blaze [their] marriage’ and bring about ‘reconcil[iation]’ (III.iii.149-50).

That the Friar should turn to a medicinal ‘remedy’ for peace is apt given his unwitting pharmaceutical reading of Verona’s central tensions:

\begin{quote}
Within the infant rind of this weak flower  
Poison hath residence, and medicine power:  
For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part;  
Being tasted, stays all senses with the heart.  
Two such opposed kings encamp them still  
In man as well as herbs: grace and rude will;
\end{quote}

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\(^{165}\) Browne, p. 135.  
\(^{166}\) Pollard, p. 101.
And where the worser is predominant
Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.

(II.iii.19-26)

Highlighting the tension between ‘[t]wo such opposed kings’—one which reminds us of the play’s ‘two houses’—the Friar suggests the potential of the ‘infant rind’ to either ‘poison’ or ‘cheer’ the ‘weak flower’: if administered correctly, it will medicate; if too much is consumed, ‘death eats up that plant’. The issue here, as Pollard observes, is ‘one of degree’: indeed, as this chapter has emphasised, channelling Galen and Descartes, such intervals are significant.\footnote{Pollard, p. 98.} As \textit{Romeo and Juliet} repeatedly reminds us, departure from the prescribed melody, the healthy pulse, the healthy dose, is risky. But there is curative potential in those dangerous spaces. If the Friar’s model of desire is ‘at odds with the portrait offered by the play itself’, as Pollard asserts, it is because desire in this play occurs in the off-beat, in the moment of delay, in the experience of syncope, at the intersection between life and death.\footnote{Pollard, p. 97.} Put simply, while the Friar might acknowledge the potential for the ecstatic experience to bring these families together, he fails to recognise that such an ecstasy cannot be artificially administered. What the Friar offers is merely an ecstatic experience that is ‘by the book’, and in a play that repeatedly locates value in the natural over the artificial, that denounces Petrarchan models and patriarchal limits in search of authentic experience, it should come as no surprise that ‘a thing like death’ will never be able to achieve the ecstasy of the real thing.

Like the syncopated off-beat that pricks the ear in expectation, Juliet’s artificial ecstasy anticipates agony. As Lucretius, Shakespeare, and Donne variously warned at the outset of this chapter, that is the cost (or, rather, ‘th’expence’) of ecstatic projection, real or medicinally administered: the snap-back follows hard on its heels. For Juliet, this return to self comes simultaneously early and too late, for while Shakespeare’s Friar extends the
length of the forty hour ‘extasie’ in Painter’s version by two hours, her ‘unnatural sleep’ (Viii.152) lasts just twenty-four hours; as René Weis observes, ‘the Friar calculates that Juliet will be in a coma for forty-two hours from Wednesday night’, but with the wedding hastily moved forward, Juliet ‘swallows the draught on Tuesday night instead’, and wakes the following evening. True to the model it replicates, this syncope is cut short, and in this ‘unkind hour’ (145) the lovers are tragically out of sync, as Romeo discovers Juliet just moments before she wakes. Believing Juliet to be dead, Romeo spends his final moments trying to achieve the only remaining opportunity for intersubjective union:

Arms, take your last embrace. And lips, O you
The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
A dateless bargain to engrossing death.

(113-5)

‘Thus with a kiss’ (120) Romeo couples his body and soul with Juliet’s, and his soul departs his body for a world without limits; as Brooke has it, Romeo’s ‘long imprisoned soule, hath freedome wonne at last’. ‘Thus with a kiss’, with a ‘last embrace’, Romeo seeks something akin to the Platonic ‘happy death’, the ‘wondrous contract’ of intersubjective union. ‘Thus with a kiss’ Romeo is thrown beside himself. Waking to find Romeo dead, Juliet responds in kind—‘I will kiss thy lips’—before willing ‘happy death’ with ‘happy dagger’ (169). Brooke articulates the faith that lies behind Juliet’s action:

O welcome death (quoth she) end of unhappines,
That also art beginning of assured happines:
Feare not to darte me nowe, thy stripe no longer stay,
Prolong no longer now my lyfe, I hate this long delaye.
For straight my parting sprite, out of this carkas fled,
At case shall finde my Romeus sprite, emong so many ded.

If Juliet’s dagger is ‘happy’, it is because it simultaneously promises the ‘end of unhappines’, and the ‘beginning of assured happines’; Brooke’s Juliet imagines death as

170 Brooke, p. 75.
171 Brooke, p. 78.
a way of finally throwing off the ‘long delaye’ that has kept her apart from Romeo, and as a way of achieving the immediacy of contact that, in Shakespeare’s text, characterizes their love from the outset. Furthermore, Juliet understands that it is only in ‘[de]parting’ herself that she can ‘finde’ Romeo, and that such departure from self will ultimately deliver them over to an ecstasy that can last: ‘That so our parted sprites, from light that we see here, | In place of endlesse light and blisse, may euer live yfere [together]’.\footnote{Brooke, p. 78.} To die in the beloved and live together in loving mutuality is something that ecstasy has both promised and held out of reach: now, having enjoyed the ecstasy of petite mort and endured an ecstatic little death, Juliet throws herself beside herself for the final time: ‘She grones she stretcheth out her simmes, she shuttes her eyes, | And from her corps the sprite doth fiye. What should I say: she dyes’\footnote{Brooke, p. 78.}. Up until this point, ecstasy has been ‘a thing like death’: now death delivers ecstasy.

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\((\text{Juliet stabs herself and falls})\): with this final act of dissonance, this final beat, Shakespeare’s syncopated subject yields the disrupted interval, and so negotiations the transition from discord to harmony. For syncope has two functions: ‘to save the dissonance which precedes, and to prepare that which follows’\footnote{Rousseau, p. 391.}. Syncope cuts itself off, suspends itself in the between, in order to bring dissonance through to harmonious consonance; there is, in other words, harmonious potential in syncope’s productive discord. It is this potential that has repeatedly driven the subjects of this chapter towards the ecstatic moment, to contemplate the harmony beyond the syncopated interim. For some, the ecstatic

\footnote{Brooke, p. 78.}  
\footnote{Brooke, p. 78.}  
\footnote{Rousseau, p. 391.}
experience is something to guard oneself against: for others, it is worth the risk. In this, the subjects of this chapter aptly articulate the dangers and rewards of ‘suffering ecstasy’: there is no guarantee of safe return, but that is the terrific nature of this terrifying experience. For Brooke’s Romeo and Juliet, this leap of faith allows them to achieve something akin to Donne’s ecstatic model: the inter-animation of ‘parted sprites’ into an ‘abler soule’ (‘The Extasie’, 43). Indeed, in the final stages of Shakespeare’s play, we see this unifying potential of this ecstasy:

CAPULET O brother Montague, give me thy hand.
This is my daughter’s jointure, for no more Can I demand.
MONTAGUE But I can give thee more;
For I will ray her statue in pure gold,
That while Verona by that name is known,
There shall no figure of such rate be set
As that of true and faithful Juliet.
CAPULET As rich shall Romeo’s by his lady’s lie,
Poor sacrifice of our enmity.

(\textit{Rom.}, Viii.296-304)

‘Reason in itself confounded, | Saw division grow together’ (\textit{PhT}, 41-2): the play’s final ecstasy is not that of the lovers, but of Verona’s divided state. Freeing themselves from the interim ‘twixt two equall Armies’ (‘The Extasie’, 13), the lovers’ final ecstasy provides a catalyst for ‘division [to] grow together’, as they ‘with their death bury their parents’ strife’ (\textit{Rom.}, I.0.8). And so, to recall John Playford’s musical definition at the outset of this section, Shakespeare’s ‘star-crossed lovers’ act as syncopated ‘notes driven till the time falls even again’, and it is in their suicides that they provide the final unifying beat, one that the play’s Prologue promised, and one that Descartes assured us would ‘acquiesce in a most perfect Consonance, or Unison’. Strong enough to ‘incorporate two in one’ (\textit{Rom.}, II.x:37), we find that, in Clément’s terms, ‘the last beat is the saving one’.\textsuperscript{175} Like Donne’s ecstatic couple—mirrored in the ‘sepulchral statues’ of Romeo and Juliet in the Capulet

\textsuperscript{175} Clément, p. 5.
monument, and prefiguring those which will be erected in ‘pure gold’—Capulet takes Montague’s hand and unites these ‘two households both alike in dignity’. If being hand-to-hand was earlier in the play encoded with violence, it is here a gesture of a mutual incorporation: ‘So to’entergraft our hands, as yet | Was all the means to make us one’ (‘The Extasie’, 9-10). As Clément has it, ‘syncope always provokes this sense of reunion’.¹⁷⁶ Like ‘lips on lips’ (Vén., 120) or ‘palm to palm’ (Rom., I.v.99), hand-in-hand here dissolves Verona’s divided state into a ‘concordant one’ (PhT, 46). After all, as we have seen throughout this chapter, to experience ecstasy is to have a change of heart.

¹⁷⁶ Clément, p. 256.
Falling into an angered ‘frenzy’ (75) in a play that continually places characters quite literally beside themselves as they unknowingly traverse the same geographic space as their biological other halves, Antipholus of Ephesus is taken by all in his company for a madman. Indeed, his frenzied behaviour ‘confirms no less’, with his body displaying visible signs—we are encouraged to ‘mark how he trembles’, to observe ‘how fiery and sharp he looks’, to acknowledge his irregular ‘pulse’—understood to evidence ‘his ecstasy’. But to recognize Antipholus as ‘suffering ecstasy’ here, to borrow once again from the speaker of Shakespeare’s ‘A Lover’s Complaint’ (69), is to recognize this ‘outrageous fit of madness’ (Vi.139) as a physical response to, indeed reflection of, the sustained fracturing that his identity endures during the course of the play: an ecstasy which at once leaves his mind and body trembling on the verge of collapse. ‘Mistress, both man and master is possessed; | I know it by their pale and deadly looks’ (IViv:86-7): rather than denoting a fit or possession, as conjurer and schoolmaster Doctor Pinch confidently asserts, Antipholus’ ecstatic tremulousness here in fact denotes quite the opposite: a fit brought about by a lack of (self-) possession. As I have been suggesting throughout this thesis, Shakespearean ‘ecstasy’, while acknowledging the state to be
rooted in and associated with ‘madness’, resists being neatly reduced to those terms, and often engages with the wider issues of subjectivity at play in the text. Considering this moment in those terms, Antipholus’ ‘ecstasy’ is not just the experience of a frenzied madman: it is a state that obeys ecstasy’s etymological sense of displacement (from the Greek \textit{ek} and \textit{histanai}—to stand or place outside). That Antipholus is ecstatic comes as a result of his brother’s resolution to ‘go lose [him]self’ (I.ii.29) in a city where being a ‘stranger’ (60) will ultimately cause his twin to become ‘estranged from [him]self’ (II.i.111) and those around him. Antipholus’ ecstasy, in short, is more than ‘frenzy’: it is a symptom of the displaced self.

This notion of the ecstatic experience as a symptom of displacement is central to the discussion that follows. Returning ecstasy to its etymological sense of being placed outside, the first section of this chapter continues the above diagnosis of the displaced, tranced subject in \textit{The Comedy of Errors}. Establishing that, in this play, a subject’s identity is often bound up with their literal geographic placement, this section argues that \textit{Errors} dramatizes a model of ecstatic subjectivity: where self-fracture is literalized by the movement of two identical subjects. Having asserted the centrality of place to the subject’s sense of self, the remainder of this chapter provides an extended reading of these issues in \textit{Othello}, exploring the play’s fractured models of subjectivity through the lens of the ecstasy of displacement.
I. TRANCED SUBJECTS: SPACE, PLACE, AND SELF IN *THE COMEDY OF ERRORS*

In a play like *The Comedy of Errors*, we find the extent to which identity is established via position (be it geographic or social), only for those positions to be turned into chaos: where spatial representations of subjectivity make clear the extent to which self is constituted in relation to the place and displacement of others. In fact, we learn, as the play invariably favours the fortunes of the Syracusean over his local counterpart, Antipholus S. is able to find himself—‘There’s not a man I meet with but doth salute me | As if I were their well-acquainted friend, | And every one doth call me by name’ (IV.iii.1-3)—only at the cost of displacing his twin:

ANTIPHOLUS E. … upon me the guilty doors were shut,
And I denied to enter my own house …
ADRIANA O, husband, God doth know you dined at home …
ANTIPHOLUS E. Say, wherefore didst thou lock me forth today …?
ADRIANA I did not, gentle husband, lock thee forth. (IV.iv.57-91)

This is, as Wesley Kort observes, the inherent contradiction of ‘languages of place’, for while ‘they secure our location and environment’, they also ‘open us up to the vulnerability of our places and locations’; ‘the languages of place serve to give … both an identity or coherence and a chronic instability’. And Shakespeare’s addition of another set of ‘twins both alike’ (I.i.55) (thus departing from his primary source, Plautus’s *Menaechmi*, and fashioning over fifty misrecognitions out of an original seventeen) serves to double his drama of displacement:

DROMIO S. [Within] … Go, get thee from the door.
DROMIO E. What patch is made our porter? My master stays in the

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2 ‘It is appropriate’, writes Neely, ‘that this play became immediately synonymous with errors since it systematically multiplies those in Plautus by adding to his twin *Menaechmi* a second set of servant twins, a sister-in-law for the local twin, incidents taken from Plautinus’s *Amphitruo*, and a framing plot involving the twins’ father and mother, Egeon and Emilia’, *Distracted Subjects*, p. 140.
DROMIO S. [Within] Let him walk from whence he came, lest he catch cold on’s feet.
ANTIPHOLUS E. Who talks within, there? Ho, open the door.
DROMIO S. [Within] Right, sir, I'll tell you when and you'll tell me wherefore.
ANTIPHOLUS E. Wherefore? For my dinner. I have not dined today.
DROMIO S. [Within] Nor today here you must not. Come again when you may.
ANTIPHOLUS E. What are thou that keep’st me from the house I owe?
DROMIO S. [Within] The porter for this time, sir, and my name is Dromio.
DROMIO E. O, villain, thou hast stolen both mine office and my name.

(III.i.35-44)

Stood beside himself, ‘Dromio’ is at once within and without, with Dromio E. seeking access to that which Dromio S. denies from [within]. Thus is Dromio E. ‘for this time’ displaced, both in the sense that an imposter has ‘stolen both [his] office and [his] name’, but also because, despite his jest that ‘if thou hadst bee in Dromio today in my place, | Thou wouldst have changed thy face for a name, | Or thy name for an ass’ (46-8), Dromio S. has of course spent the day just so, now occupying his place and so forcing his local counterpart to stand outside, where accordingly, his ‘master [must also] stay … in the street’, ‘ke[pt] from the house [he] owe[s]’. While Dromio/Antipholus S. is welcomed and interpolated, therefore, Dromio/Antipholus E. is as a consequence driven out (of both ‘house’ and any stable sense of, or claim to self). Just as the lovers in A Midsummer Night’s Dream located desire beyond the city walls, or like Romeo and Juliet who situated themselves in seemingly impossible threshold spaces, moments of ecstatic thrownness in Errors simultaneously serve to undermine and constitute notions of self. To stand outside provides a new perspective on one’s self and place.

What comes into focus, therefore, is a relationship between domestic (and theatrical) architecture, and the architecture of the self, a relationship that critics such as Timothy Preiss have identified in their suggestion of a correlation between the births of subjective and architectural interiority. ‘Interiority’, Preiss suggests, ‘begins not as a
psychic property, but as a spatial one, as a property of the playing space itself—as the literal sensation of feeling both inside and outside something at once’.3 Indeed, the notion of interiority as a spatial property is the locus of the problem that the Dromios face as they endlessly, unknowingly find themselves displaced by or in the place of one another; ‘I am in adversity’ (IViv.19) notes Dromio E. as he finds himself living in a state that is contrary or opposite (OED, ‘adversity’, n. 2) to his sense of self before this ‘one day’s error’ (VI.397), while his counterpart desperately seeks self-clarification: ‘Am I Dromio? … Am I myself?’ (III.ii.72-3). Mary Thomas Crane similarly understands ‘inwardness’ as ‘a historical concept that was only just beginning to be developed’, noting The Comedy of Errors as being written at a moment ‘when interiority, involving linked concepts of individual inner life and domestic privacy, was taking on a new cultural significance’.4 This was a period when theatres began to take on a new architectural identity—now self-contained with walls which could simultaneously permit and exclude audiences—and when homes were similarly becoming increasingly private.5 In short, theatrical and domestic architecture was changing, and the architecture and spatiality of the self along with it. It is in having his ‘doors … shut against his entrance’ (IViv.81) that Antipholus E. is entranced, and we mark how he trembles.

To lose one’s place, therefore, might be to lose oneself. And this applied to those off stage just as much as it did to those on it, much to the anxiety of the nonconformist,

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5 ‘Between 1570 and 1640’, notes Crane, ‘the structure of English houses at all levels of society changed dramatically’, with peasant dwellings—‘which had housed people and animals under one roof and human inhabitants in a single open room’—now becoming ‘a separate house and barn’ with ‘a loft for storage and sleeping’, p. 43. These were changes that provided both a higher standard of living, and more individual privacy. See also Lena Cowen Orlin, Elizabethan Households: An Anthology (Washington, D.C.: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1995).
Puritanical preacher John Northbrooke in his *Treatise wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Playes or Enterluds ... are Reproved* (1577):

Nourish not among you these ydle loitering persons, but compell them with very hunger to labour ... Truly you may see dayly what multitudes are gathered togethre at those Playes, of all sortes, to the greate displeasure of almightie God, and daunger of their soules. ... He despiseth the Temple of God, that he maye runne to the Theatre: the Church is alwaye emptie and voyde, the playing place is replenished and full: we leaue Christ alone at the aultar, and seede our eyes with vaine and vnhonnest sights, and with filthie and uncleane playes. 

In one of the earlier attacks on early modern play going, Northbrooke’s concerns about ‘masterless persons’ and wandering vagrants in his diatribe against idleness are centred around the extent to which place is constitutive of identity; as Jean E. Howard notes in her discussion of Northbrooke’s frustrations with ‘these ydle loi-tering persons’, ‘people at the theatre are not where they should be’ and, by consequence, ‘they are not who they should be and are not performing a useful social function’. These were bodies that needed to be returned to their proper place—back to their parishes, back to work, or into the church—if order was to be restored. For both audience and actor alike, therefore, the theatre was considered a place of destabilising self-transformation, a place where one’s place—and accordingly one’s identity—was unfixed, fluid, and volatile. In going to the theatre, laments Northbrooke’s contemporary antitheatricalist Stephen Gosson, we are ever ‘passing our boundes, going beyonde our limites, never keeping ourselves within compasse’. In the theatre, quite literally, the subject is never at home, but always beside themselves.

If, in *Errors*, Shakespeare plays out a drama of ecstatic disseverance between two distinct characters, what a broader examination of his tranced subjects reveals is a similar

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6 John Northbrooke, *A Treatise Wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Playes or Enterluds with Other Idle Pastimes ... are Reproved* (London: by Henry Bynneman, 1577), p. 32; 62; 64.
dynamic whereby those subjects, divided from themselves, come to occupy distinct spaces. Simultaneously thrown into a trance and out of themselves, out of consciousness and into ecstasy, the tranced subject occupies a liminal space that pushes them to the limit of their bodily and subjective borders. The word itself, derived from the French transe and Latin transire (trans across, ire, to go), denotes a passage or passing over, a transition between states, most commonly between life and death or between sleeping and waking, but also carries a spatial sense, as we have seen here, of moving between locations, or passing between buildings: ‘they stand at the door’ (III.i.68). ‘With delight I was entranced and carried so far from myself’: both ‘entranced’—that is, entering in to a trance—and ‘carried’ away, Eudox in Spenser’s A View of the State of Ireland (1596) articulates a state befitting of a word that itself operates in opposite directions. While architecturally an ‘entrance’ designates an entering in, it occupies a liminal space that is at once both (and neither) in and out: it is an exit just as much as an entrance. To be en-tranced, therefore, is to occupy this intermediary space, allowing for movement in both directions. ‘Intrance thy selfe in thy sweet extasie’: ecstasy, I have been suggesting, operates in much the same way, encompassing both directions of subjective experience. For the ecstatic subject is not only sent out, but also, as Philip King will later articulate, ‘drawn into [them]self with extasies … and struck into a transport’. Indeed, we see these dynamics literally enacted throughout Errors as one Antipholus twin is ‘carried away’ (and his accompanying Dromio tirelessly ‘struck into a transport’ with violent blows) while the other is ‘drawn in’. This is model that is obeyed even to the play’s final stages, with Antipholus E.

11 These spatial representations of subjectivity in The Comedy of Errors extend further still, in that the twins are quite literally defined by adjectives of placement; borrowing from his Plautine source, Shakespeare calls one brother ‘Antipholus Serreptus’—or ‘snatched away’—and the other ‘Antipholus Errans’: to wander. The names, as Lynn Enterline has suggested, therefore ‘define each twin not by virtue of some original place, but by virtue of being located elsewhere’,
forcibly ‘carried away’ to receive treatment by Doctor Pinch in the play’s penultimate act while Antipholus S. retreats into an abbey to take refuge: ‘This is some priory. In, or we are spoiled’ (V. i. 37). Words like ecstasy and trance, it seems, not only denote tranced states, but are themselves tranced denotations.

These dramatizations of displacement also offer geographic reflections of the Antipholus’s internal states, where emotional disposition (one’s physical temperament or humour) is articulated through spatial dis-position (finding oneself out of place).12 As Carol Thomas Neely has suggested, if we are to follow the diagnoses offered by the play and deem both these characters to be ‘mad’, we ought more properly to observe them as being mad in quite different measure; while Antipholus E. is presented as ‘the more “choleric” and misogynist of the twins, … represented as beating his servant, raging at his wife, … [and] attribut[ing] madness to all those who misrecognize him, never for a moment doubting his own … sanity’, Antipholus S. instead ‘becomes the more sympathetic of the two brothers … represented as habitually “melancholy” … yearning, and dissatisfied, not settled and self-satisfied like his twin … fear[ing] for his own stability’.13 Indeed, the Syracusan’s moment of self-scrutinizing introspection—‘Am I in earth, in heaven, or in hell? | Sleeping or waking? mad or well advised? | Known unto these, and to myself disguised?’ (II.i. 203-6)—is absent from his local counterpart who, as his wife can attest having unknowingly taken twin for husband, is of an opposite temperament:

This week he hath been heavy, sour, sad,
And much different from the man he was.

13 Neely, p. 141-2.
But till this afternoon his passion  
Ne'er brake into extremity of rage.  

(Vi.45-8)

One ‘drawn into himself with exstasies’, the other ‘carried so far from [him]self’, the twins therefore represent opposing models of ecstasy in the terms of divided selfhood as we have understood it thus far.

From Lady Macbeth’s sleepwalking to Titus’ grief, Shakespeare invests considerable dramatic attention in those suffering mental affliction: to ‘distracted subjects’ as Neely has identified them, a term which in the early modern period ‘emphasized that sufferers of mental distress were viewed as divided, diverted, disassembled—as beside themselves—temporarily’. In this, notes Neely, ‘distract’ serves as an adjective ‘denoting not permanent attributes, but temporary behaviors,’ and so finds company among ‘many other overlapping adjectives that label disordered states—“lovesick,” “troubled-in-mind,” “idle-headed,” “melancholic,” “lunatic,” “frenzied,” “mad”’. To this wide semantic field, this chapter adds one more: ecstatic. In so doing it also contributes a subject who, though absent from Neely’s study, endures a number of the above afflictions, and accordingly determines ecstasy’s place within this (increasingly medicalized) lexicon of disorientation.

Moving from Antipholus’ trembling ecstasy to Othello’s convulsive seizure, this chapter explores how the ecstasies suffered by these subjects lie at the heart of what I consider to be dramas of displacement. In The Comedy of Errors, any sense of the self as an autonomous, unified entity is threatened by the presence of another, identical self: ‘twinness confuses autonomous identity’, as Kent Cartwright asserts in his introduction to the play. The model of the self that Errors presents is fractured, plural, divided: one that

14 Neely, p. 3.
15 Neely, p. 3.
is dramatized through the literal movement of one self in two bodies. In this, the play presents a model of ecstasy akin to that which was both craved for and experienced by the divine and loving subjects of the previous chapters, where ecstasy was understood as an experience of being in dialogue with another, and where the subject is constituted through that encounter. Having established the ecstatic dynamic of one self in two bodies, the remainder of this final chapter will invert that model to consider the subject that embodies two selves in *Othello*. Where ecstasy has been thus far explored as an experience towards union, it is here, by contrast, a journey through fracture. Taking the divided-self as its subject, therefore, this chapter considers the role of self-loss in the constitution of the subject.
I. ‘I AM NOT WHAT I AM’: RENAISSANCE SELF-FRACTURING

If we are our selves, to our selves, and in peace among our selves, and that our God be with us; neither the world nor the Devil can hurt us: But if there be a breach in a banke, the Sea breaks in, & ouerflowes the Land … if there be a breach in a Fort, the enemy will enter and sacke the Towne … & if there be a breach of love in the hearts of a people, the enemy will take advantage for the invasion of the kingdom. See then, and consider how dangerous a thing is division, and how safe an assurance is unitie.17

For the early modern subject, poet and novelist Nicholas Breton’s message would have been a familiar one: unity over division. Published in 1607, Breton’s pamphlet, A Murmurer, found itself on London bookstalls in the company of other debates surrounding the Union of England and Scotland; ‘the Tower of Babell could not be builded’, writes Breton, ‘when the languages were divided’, just as ‘England was disturbed, when Scotland was divided’:

but now the Landes all bearing one name, the Subjects all one, under one King, the laws all tending to one ende; why should not the Nations bee all one people?18

Unsurprising given his support for James I’s drive for a more united kingdom, Breton’s stance on this is clear: to be unified is to be stable and safe; division is dangerous. Othello, written just a few years previously (c.1604), is similarly plagued by these anxieties. What I am suggesting is not that Shakespeare here engages in the Union debate (as James Shapiro has suggested we see more explicitly in a text like Lear, for instance), but rather that Othello is similarly concerned with what it means to be united or divided. This is a play that invites us to consider ‘how dangerous a thing is division, and how safe an assurance is unitie’.19

The pamphlet’s eponymous figure, the Murmurer, functions as a political

17 Nicholas Breton, A Murmurer (London: by Robert Ravworth, 1607), sig. F4v-F5v.
18 Breton, sig. F3v.
metaphor; marking out any ‘breach[es] in [the] Fort’ of the polis as sites of danger through which ‘the enemie will enter and sacke the Towne’. This contagious force, with his eyes ‘ever bent downewardes as if he were looking into Hell’, his ‘browes ever wrinkled with frownes, to shew the distemper of his unquiet Braine’, his ‘tongue, like the sting of a serpent, which uttereth nothing but poison’ and his breast ‘that is ready to burst with corruption’, poses a significant threat to the health and stability of the body politic.\(^\text{20}\) ‘If wee bee our selves, to our selves, and in peace among our selves,’ Breton tells us, then ‘neither the world nor the Devill can hurt us’. But to not ‘bee our selues’ is to be vulnerable to ‘that demi-devil’ who threatens to ‘ensnare’ both ‘soul and body’ (\textit{Oth.}, Vii.294-5). As Pierre le Loyer warns:

So mischievous is the divell, that he creepeth throughout all the passages of the senses. Hee adhereth vnto soundes, … and hee filleth all the passages of the intelligence with certayne mistes and clowdes. And by the same reason it happeneth also, That the divell dooth cast himselfe also into the inward and interiour senses, and into the fantasie of men, and mooveth them in the same sorte as hee dooth the externall: and by a certayne extasie and alienation of their spirites which hee causeth; hee maketh diverse formes, specters, and phantosmes to appeare in their imaginations.\(^\text{21}\)

The devil, as described by le Loyer, works in much the same way as Iago; with equally disruptive potential, as I will demonstrate, this external figure can put the subject into ‘a certayne extasie and alienation of their spirities’. Like Breton’s Murmerer, Iago’s threat lies in his capacity to infiltrate unstable structures and unguarded boundaries. As anthropologist Mary Douglas tells us, ‘all margins are dangerous’, for to interact with the energy that lies there ‘is to have been in contact with danger, to have been at a source of power’, and one runs the risk of altering the internal state (social or bodily) as a result.\(^\text{22}\)


\(^{22}\) Mary Douglas, \textit{Purity and Danger} (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 150; 120.
Boundaries are safe: venturing beyond them is not.

i) Othello’s Content: Iago and the Fantasy of Displacement

We saw in the previous chapter the loving subject’s desire to be united with and become indivisible from the beloved, a desire which Othello shares and through which the play ‘induces deep uncertainty about human separation’. As we heard above, and will see below, unity is safe: division is dangerous. Early in the play we see Desdemona assert herself as unable to endure the ‘heavy interim’ of the Moor’s absence should ‘he go to the war’ without her (256; 254), shortly followed by the ‘wrack and sufferance’ that ensues as their ships are ‘parted’ with foul and violent tempest’ (II.i.33-4) leaving those on shore to pray for their safe reunion: ‘Great Jove, Othello guard | And swell his sail with thine own powerful breath | That he may … Make love’s quick pants in Desdemona’s arms’ (77-80). Indeed, it is in his greeting of Desdemona that Othello’s uncertainties about their separation are first made clear:

It gives me wonder as great as my content
To see you here before me. O my soul’s joy,
If after every tempest come such calms,
May the winds blow till they have wakened death
... If I were now to die,
’Twere now to be most happy; for I fear
My soul hath her content so absolute
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate.

(178-8)

If Donne is correct that ‘you and I are nothing … when on a divers shore’ (‘A Valediction of Weeping’, 9), then Othello’s joy here lies in their having ‘triumph[ed] over distancing’, to borrow Derrida’s phrase, and he ‘cannot speak enough of this content’.

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It stops me here; it is too much of joy.
And this, and this, the greatest discords be
They kiss
That e’er our hearts shall make!

(191-4)

As he speaks of his ‘content’—a word he uses three times in fewer than fifteen lines—Othello presents himself as complete, ‘absolute’, and bounded by his desires. His ‘soul hath … content so absolute’ because of his union with Desdemona: because she makes him content (*OED*, *n*. 2: satisfaction, pleasure) but also because she provides him with content (*OED*, *n*. 1: that which is contained). If this is, as Arthur Kirsch has it, ‘the most ecstatic moment in the play’, then it is here that we witness most fully the force with which love moves Othello: how powerfully he feels it, the extent to which he is informed by it.25 Othello is not oblivious to the implications of his affections, and ‘fear[s]’ the ‘unknown fate’ (185; 188) that may not offer a match to this present delight: ‘it is too much of joy’. To hear an echo of Portia in these lines—‘allay thy ecstasy, in measure rein thy joy, scant the excess … make it less for fear I surfeit’ (*MV*, III.ii.111-4)—is to hear a warning against the ‘shudd’ring fear and green eyed jealousy’ (110) that Othello’s ‘surfeit’ will enable Iago to inflict: this is loving not wisely, but too well. Othello’s ‘content so absolute’ is, therefore, at once ‘permeated … with a sense … of dangers barely escaped’, as Valerie Traub observes, and of dangers yet to come; ‘at the same time that Othello celebrates his peak of joy so markedly’, writes Susan Snyder, ‘his invocations of death, fear, and unknown fate make us apprehensive about the post-comic future’.26 Absolute contentment comes with the threat of disruption; ‘that which is contained’ can be emptied out, and Iago knows it: ‘O, you are well tuned now! | But I’ll set down the pegs that make this music’

(194-5). In the previous chapter, *Romeo and Juliet*’s Friar sought to appropriate ecstasy in order to achieve harmonious consonance between the warring houses: here, Iago manipulates the dynamics of ecstasy with an eye to throwing all into discord.

In *Othello*’s wondrous contentment, therefore, we are reminded of the loving subject’s desire to end separation from the beloved by collapsing the ‘unkind breach’ between them, as Derrida articulates in his ‘post card apocalypse’:

> When we will separate from each other, when I will separate myself, I will see you. I will turn back toward you. But I have never known how to separate myself. I will learn, and then I will take you into me and there will no longer be any distance between us. I already feel in my body … strange mimetisms.27

Comprised of a series of loving exchanges between himself and his (pseudo-fictional) beloved, Derrida’s ‘postal principle’ provides a familiar narrative of self-division and self-location via another: ‘setting you astray from yourself in order to set you on your way toward me’.28 In this, we might understand the ecstatic dynamic through the terms of correspondence, as Donne (similarly conflating ‘letters’ with ‘ourselves’) would agree:

> ‘th[e] writing of letters is a kind of extasie, and a departure … of the soul, which doth then communicate itself to two bodies … I oftentimes deliver myself over in writing’.29

> In absenitia, therefore, the letter functions as a surrogate self through which the loving subject seeks to overcome the frustrations of separation. Division from the beloved is a painful torment for the subject that desires, above all, the absolute content of union. To this, Othello is no exception. ‘Nothing’, according to Stanley Cavell, ‘could be more certain to Othello than that Desdemona exists; is flesh and blood; is separate from him; other. This is precisely the possibility that tortures him’.30 And this is, therefore, precisely the possibility that Iago uses to torture him:

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28 *The Post Card*, p. 69.
IAGO    Did Michael Cassio, when you wooed my lady,
        Know of your love?

OTHELLO    He did, from first to last—
        Why dost thou ask?

IAGO    But for a satisfaction of my thought,
        No further harm.

OTHELLO    Why of thy thought, Iago?

IAGO    I did not think he had been acquainted with her.

OTHELLO    O yes, and went between us very oft.

IAGO    Indeed?

OTHELLO    Indeed? Ay indeed. Discern'st thou aught in that?

Is he not honest?

(III.iii.96-104)

Iago begins to disrupt the network of loving correspondence between Desdemona and Othello, not by simply interleaving Cassio into it, but by reminding Othello that Cassio was there all along, ‘from first to last’.31 And so Othello must consider whether in delivering himself over to Desdemona (in letters sent via Cassio), he has as a consequence inadvertently delivered Cassio to Desdemona, and vice versa. While Othello must ‘walk the works’ and ‘inspect the fortifications’ in Act III, Scene iii, taking the necessary precautions against invading enemies, Iago has already found a breach in the fort, in Breton’s terms, and has begun to insinuate himself into the cracks.

Shakespeare plays out these anxieties of delivery and destination throughout the canon.32 The delivery of Proteus’s love letter to Julia which opens The Two Gentlemen of Verona is, for instance, particularly problematic; we see it delivered through a number of hands—from ‘Valentine’s Page’ to Lucetta who, ‘being in the way’ (I.i.39-40), receives the letter on Julia’s behalf—before being dropped, picked up, and finally torn up by its

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31 Harry Berger Jr. examines the implications of Desdemona’s reminder to Othello that ‘Cassio came awooring with you’ (III.iii.71), a statement which he compellingly demonstrates ‘has an edge to it’ in A Fury in the Words: Love and Embarrassment in Shakespeare’s Venice (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 97.

32 Derrida, writing on the back of a post-card, shares this anxiety that his messenger (or the Courrier, the Facteur, the Postman as they are variously termed throughout his correspondences) cannot be trusted. ‘[I w]ould like to address myself, in a straight line,’ he writes, ‘directly, without courrier, only to you, but I do not arrive, and that is the worst of it. A tragedy, my love, of destination’ (The Post Card, p. 12).
addressee. The letter, therefore, does not always arrive at its destination, the full tragic potential of which Shakespeare dramatizes in the Friar’s undelivered letter in *Romeo and Juliet*: ‘I writ to Romeo | That he should hither come this dire night … but he which bore my letter … was stay’d by accident, and yesternight | Return’d my letter back’ (Viii.246-52). Elsewhere, in *Twelfth Night*, Orsino’s loving correspondence with Olivia is undermined by his messenger who, delivering their own words rather than Orsino’s—‘you are now out of your text’ (I.v.214) as Olivia remarks—unwittingly wins her affections and displaces Orsino. Othello’s anxieties about having sent Cassio ‘between and between’ (*Tro.,* I.i.69) him and Desdemona are, by these accounts, well founded. ‘[He] went between us very oft’: what were once considered letters of loving exchange, connecting lover and beloved via an ecstatic ‘double string’ (Donne, ‘The Extasie’, 8), are, for Othello, now plagued with doubt: ‘is he not honest?’ Exploiting Othello’s anxieties about Desdemona being separate from him, Iago supplants Cassio into the gap between them in order to keep her that way, expanding the interim between lover and beloved, and situating himself into the space between the two. Othello may well ‘fail … to tolerate the paradox of being one but two’, as James Kuzner observes, but Iago brings him into a world where he can no longer ignore it.33

Iago, this chapter suggests, exploits this paradox, and while Othello may fail to tolerate it, *Othello* (as directed by Iago) invests itself in the exploration of what is at stake in a world where one can become two and vice versa. As Iago turns Desdemona’s virtue to pitch, Othello’s identity changes with it; if we allow ourselves to exist in and be defined by our relationships, then Othello’s marriage accordingly determines his identity: it is Desdemona’s supposed infidelity that renders him ‘cuckold’ (IV.i.193).34 As Kuzner writes, and as the subjects of the previous chapter may well agree, ‘in her, not him, is he

33 Kuzner, *Shakespeare as a Way of Life*, p. 75.
thus or thus'. And this cuts both ways. For having been stamped with a false address by Iago—‘I took you for that cunning whore of Venice’—Desdemona is unsure both of her destination—‘My lord? … My lord?’—and how to address herself: ‘am I that name, Iago?’ (IV.ii.87; IV.i.220; 230; IV.ii.118). Disrupting the dynamics of loving correspondence and displacing Desdemona from Othello’s affections, Iago’s transmutations ultimately exhibit that to live in the receipt of others is an opportunity to find oneself within and through another, but accordingly is also to live in dangerous ecstasy.

Such fantasies of displacement are central to Iago’s machinations from the outset. What motivates this desire to surplant others—to ‘put the Moor … into a jealousy so strong’ (II.i.299), to ‘put Cassio in some action | That may offend the isle’ (II.iii.57-8)—is the fact that Iago was first displaced by them. ‘I am worth no worse a place’, laments Iago as he reveals how Othello turned down his ‘personal suit to make me his lieutenant’, having instead given that position to ‘One Michael Cassio’ (I.i.8-10; 19). In the play’s opening stages, Iago announces that he has been denied the place of the placeholder (lieu place, tenant holding). Furthermore, Othello has not only denied this placement, but has displaced him from his loving interlocutor; ‘it is thought abroad that ‘twixt my sheets | He’s done my office’, Iago announces: ‘I do suspect the lusty Moor | Hath leaped into my seat’ (L.iii.386-7; II.i.293-4). If Iago seems put out, then, it is because Othello has not only put someone else in the place he felt he deserved, but has furthermore replaced him in his marital bed. In these circumstances, an announcement such as ‘I am not what I am’ (I.i.64) is not simply an announcement of false duplicity, of being two-faced, but of actually being in some crucial sense duplicate, fractured, dislocated from self.

35 Kuzner, *Shakespeare as a Way of Life*, p. 56.
Describing the death of his friend Étienne de la Boetie in his essay ‘Of Friendship’, Montaigne articulates his particular grief as entailing the irrecoverable loss of a second self. Emphasising how such relationships enable man to ‘double himself’, Montaigne highlights that the implications of being so ‘glued together’ is that being ‘sundred’ enacts an intensely painful experience which ‘pull[s] away some piece of our owne’. 36 As Adriana articulates in The Comedy of Errors, entreatign Antipholus ‘not [to] tear thyself from me’ (II.ii.115), loss of one’s other half cannot occur ‘without … diminishing’ oneself (120). Just as Montaigne’s response to this painful experience is to replace this lost interlocutor by fashioning a second self in the Essays—’I was so accustomed to be ever two, and so enured to be never single, that me thinks I am but halfe my selfe’—I suggest that Iago responds in comparable fashion. Lovers, in Derrida’s postal formulations, ‘send back each other’: to lose one’s other half is to lose this kind of reflection. 37 If Othello has ‘leaped into [Iago’s] seat’ and dislocated his bonds to Emilia, occupying his position as alter-idem—‘the thought whereof | Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw my inwards’ (II.i.294-5)—Iago responds by replacing his lost second self with a perverse other. ‘I am not what I am’: with this claim, Iago shows how the dynamics of loving ecstasy can be converted into a kind of violent self-fracture.

‘I am not what I am’ is, in many ways, the calling card of the ecstatically fractured subject: never ‘at home’ but always beside or outside of itself. An inversion of divine agency—‘I AM THAT I AM’ (Exodus, 3:15)—in Iago’s keynote line of self-gemination we hear echoes of a number of other self-divided Shakespearean characters, from Viola

36 Montaigne, I.27.94; I.38.121. See also Will Tosh’s exploration of such models alongside less familiar forms of friendship in Male Friendship and Testimonies of Love in Shakespeare’s England (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
37 Montaigne, I.27.93; Derrida, The Post Card, p. 83.
(who made an identical claim two years earlier in *Twelfth Night*) to *King Lear*’s Edgar and his enigmatically nihilistic assertion ‘I nothing am’, to Richard III as he trembles himself into fracture on the eve of battle:

> Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.  
> Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am.  
> Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason why?  
> Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?  
> Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? For any good  
> That I myself have done unto myself?  
> Oh, no. Alas, I rather hate myself  
> For hateful deeds committed by myself.  
> I am a villain. Yet I lie; I am not.  
> Fool, of thyself speak well. Fool, do not flatter.  
> My conscience hath a thousand several tongues …  
> I shall despair. There is no creature loves me,  
> And if I die, no soul will pity me.  
> Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself  
> Find in myself no pity to myself?  

(Viii.180-201)\(^{38}\)

Richard’s self-shattering, to apply Cynthia Marshall’s term, is disorienting and painful. Even his claim to selfhood ‘I am I’—an assertion that seeks to unite and take possession of his warring, disparate selves—is problematized by the Quarto version of the text which undermines the repair offered by his narcissistic self-embrace—‘Richard loves Richard’—by severing the two into distinct identities: here, ‘I am I’ is ‘I and I’.\(^{39}\) Unable to balance these two selves, self-identification becomes self-annihilation for Richard: ‘I am … I am not’. Torn from himself, Richard cannot recover himself; ‘both voices’, notes Joel B. Altman, ‘speak of the self as “I” or “myself”, but gradually the first begins to cower before the unremitting, cumulative depositions of the second’.\(^{40}\)

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\(^{38}\) I here follow the 1623 First Folio, where *The Norton Shakespeare* follows Q1.  
\(^{39}\) ‘[I]t is surely worth noting,’ comments Thomas Cartelli, ‘that Q’s “I and I” was changed to F’s “I am I” as early as Q2’s publication date of 1598 and in every Quarto thereafter. These changes suggest that the First Quarto’s “I and I” was either a printer’s mistake or was found considerably less instructive that “I am I” by later Quarto compositors or printers’. <http://digital.wwnorton.com/shakespeare3> [accessed 25/07/2017].  
In Shakespeare’s comedies, we see how this model works to present the restorative and self-constitutive potential of the ecstatic experience, where ‘division of yourself’ is facilitated by an environment that enables ‘division [to] grow together’ (PhT, 42), where divided subjects are not ‘dissolved and loosed’ (Tro, Vii.,163) but rather ‘cohere and jump’ (TV, Vi.246), ‘embrace’ and exit ‘hand in hand’ (Err, Vi.413; 424). ‘This general movement from threatening self-loss to self-recovery is’, as Rolf Soellner notes, ‘common to all of Shakespeare’s comedies and tragi-comedies’. Considered in this way, Viola’s assertion in Twelfth Night that ‘I am not what I am’ is, like Iago’s, more than a claim of a duplicitously disguised self. She too has suffered violent fracture, has lost her ‘other half’, her twin interlocutor, and as a result she fashions a second self in his image. Viola is, to borrow Derrida’s postal metaphors once again, ‘between two “addresses”—not merely the lodgings of Orsino and Olivia that she shuttles between, but also a mutual occupancy of ‘I’ and ‘I’: her dual residences of Viola and Cesario. The very name ‘Cesario’ evokes this sense of being parted, of being ‘untimely ripped’ (Mac, Vvii.46) from another by Caesarean section, as in birth when one becomes two. Read this way, Cesario is not simply a disguise to enhance employment prospects, but is Viola’s ecstasy: a time outside of herself.

And, in identical fashion, her identical twin similarly fashions a second self. While James Stone has read Sebastian as being ‘self-sufficient because he does not need Viola as she needs him’, Sebastian is similarly ‘undone’ by the loss of his twin. Indeed, the complexity of our introduction to Sebastian in Act II, Scene i—a structural mirror of the introduction to Viola in Act I, Scene ii—is often overlooked. ‘You must know of me then,

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41 Rolf Soellner, Shakespeare’s Patterns of Self-Knowledge (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1972), p. 63
42 Derrida, The Post Card, p. 28.
Antonio, my name is Sebastian, which I called Roderigo’ (II.i.13-4): while Sebastian
might not ‘cross dress to recuperate a lost sibling’, as Stone observes, his action of
adopting a separate identity echoes Viola: Roderigo is to Sebastian what Cesario is to
Viola.44 Or, in an Aristotelian format:

Roderigo: Sebastian :: Cesario: Viola.

These are Shakespeare’s subjective equations: his ipseic calculus. Being thrown from
oneself in this comic environment offers these subjects space to journey through self-
fracture and come back together again, from division to (re-)union, therefore creating an
ecstatic moment of ‘extricating frenzy’ (V.i.275) in the play’s conclusion that sees subjects
returned harmoniously to themselves and the lost other.

Shakespeare’s tragedies, however, tend to instead explore and exhibit the dangers
of ecstasy. A figure such as Lear, exiled from his daughter’s house and onto the stormy
heath that lies between him and Dover, sent into, rather than ‘withdraw[ing]’ from, the
‘contentious’, ‘pitiless storm’ that threatens to ‘turn … all to fools and madmen’ (Lr.,
II.i.476; III.iv.29; 77), experiences these dangers all too keenly. For it is in this
geographic interim that Shakespeare will display the vulnerability of the subject who
stands outside of both society and self by creating and widening a subjective fissure—
‘who is it that can tell me who I am’ (I.iv.221, emphasis added)—to the point of subjective
and linguistic dissolution: ‘howl, howl, howl, howl, howl’ (IV.iv.255). This is an interim of
self-loss—where Lear’s ‘me’ is divided from his ‘I’—that held as much tragic potential for
Shakespeare as it did comic. ‘The King grows mad’ (III.iv.149), we learn, for this is a play
where to go beyond is to lose control, and where self-control is always problematized by
the extent to which identity is constituted not internally, but by others. Just as Gloucester
must entrust himself to Poor Tom—himself only able to assert ‘I nothing am’, to negate

44 Stone, p. 29.
the self and fashion it anew, once he has fled from society—Lear similarly depends on others to ‘tell me who I am’, to ‘keep me in temper’ (II.iii.21; I.v.38). The desire to assert ‘I am’ and establish self-control or self-ownership is, therefore, always plagued by ‘the social conditions of our very formation’: by the question, as posed by Judith Butler in Precarious Life, ‘Who “am” I, without you?’\(^\text{45}\) For ‘each of us’, she continues:

is constituted … by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies—as a site of desire and physical vulnerability … at once assertive and exposed … attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure. … We are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well. … Let’s face it. We’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something … One does not always stay intact.\(^\text{46}\)

It is the dangerous potentialities of Butler’s celebration of being outside oneself that the ensuing discussion explores, where taking a step beside oneself is to risk or experience fracture that in Shakespeare’s tragedies all too often comes without cure. The comic desire, as C. L. Barber puts it, to journey ‘through release to clarification’ is unattainable in a tragic environment that can facilitate only projected liminality (whereby the subject exists in a state of indefinite suspension, detached from itself in a world that yields no promise of a safe return) or violent fracture (where such suspension cannot hold and the departure from self is permanent and irreversible). Or, more simply, release without clarification.\(^\text{47}\) Throughout this thesis, ecstasy has always resided at this fine line: it has always had the potential to cut both ways.

Yet while Richard, Viola and Edgar are estranged from themselves by forces largely beyond their control, Iago conversely wills and facilitates his own self-fracturing; by actively throwing himself beside himself, Iago paradoxically constitutes his self precisely through self-negation: ‘I am not what I am’. This is precisely what is at once so dangerous

\(^{45}\) Butler, Precarious Life, pp. 23; 22.

\(^{46}\) Precarious Life, p. 20; 24; 23.

and so attractive about Iago’s claim. If we find in a characteristically enigmatic claim such as ‘were I the Moor I would not be Iago’ (I.i.55) an assertion of what Greenblatt terms ‘hypothetical self-cancellation’, then what we observe in Iago’s subsequent keynote claim is a subject who has not only endured self-cancellation, but has been constituted by it. In ‘I am not what I am’, the second ‘I’ is brought into existence precisely through having not been, and through continuing not to be, the first. Neither is false in so much as neither is true, but Iago inhabits both subject positions nonetheless. Iago has, indeed, ‘gone beyond social feigning’ and has, in doing so, come into being. What we hear in Iago’s ecstatic claim is perhaps less ‘an I that will not look beyond itself’, but rather an I that is always looking beyond, a model of subjectivity that resides in projection and fashions itself precisely through the act of being thrown out: Self-Fashioning, in Greenblatt’s terms, through self-fracturing.

Where Richard struggled for self-possession, Iago possesses himself. Iago is, as Eric Langley suggests, ‘the exponent of self-perpetuating ipseity before such a thing is deemed philosophically or morally legitimate’. Acknowledging himself as being thrown out of and beside himself, Iago demonstrates a model of divided, diffuse identity, capable of projection and introspection in a way that would later become the hallmark claim of modern cynically-inflected subjectivity—‘I think therefore I am’—and that could already be heard in Montaigne’s Essays: ‘Every man lookes before himselfe, I looke within my selfe; I have no businesse but with my selfe … I roule me into my selfe’. What these claims acknowledge is that distance from oneself is required in order to reflect on oneself, that the dislocation of self from self allows one I to understand its existence in relation to

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48 Greenblatt, p. 235.
49 Greenblatt, p. 236.
51 *Narcissism and Suicide*, p. 274.
52 Montaigne, II.17.381.
another that reflects it back: to know itself ‘but by reflection’ (JC, III.iii.99), as Shakespeare’s Ulysses would have it. The departure from self that was encouraged by loving ecstasy is therefore translated into a ‘dialogue of one’ (Donne, ‘The Extasie’, 74), whereby the subject still understands itself by relation, but now does so crucially in relation to itself. ‘We are never ourselves wholly until we have wholly put ourselves off’: this is the dialogic model through which, as this study has suggested, ecstatic subjectivity is articulated: the kind of chronic self-reflexivity that, for George Goodwin’s hermaphroditic figure, discloses the ontological nothingness at the heart of being:

> My Sefle at-once I both displease and please:  
> Without my Sefle my Sefle I faine would sease:  
> For, my too-much of Mee, mee much annoyes;  
> And my Sefle’s Plentie my poore Sefle destroyes.  
> Who seeks mee in Mee, in mee shall not finde  
> Mee as my Sefle: *Hermaphrodit", in minde  
> I am at-once Male, Female, Neuter: yet  
> What e’er I am, I am not Mine (I weet):  
> I am not with my Sefle (as I conceive)  
> Wretch that I am; my Sefle my Sefle deceive:  
> Unto my Sefle, my Sefle my Sefle betray:  
> I from my Sefle banish my Sefle away:  
> My Sefle agree not with my Sefle a jot:  
> Know not my Sefle; I have my Sefle forgot: …  
> My Sefle I follow, and my Sefle I flie  
> Besides my Sefle, and in my Sefle am I."

‘Besides my Sefle, and in my Sefle am I’: this final claim to simultaneous possession and negation of self holds an individualising power, one that encapsulates this chapter’s thinking. ‘Who seeks mee in Mee, in mee shall not finde | Mee as my selfe’: obsessively self-absorbed and self-defacing, Goodwin’s subject is not, in Iago’s terms, what they are—‘at-once’ both ‘mee’ and ‘Mee’ but ‘not Mine’, never truly ‘with my Sefle’ by virtue of being beside that self. In this, both Goodwin’s speaker and Iago might be considered, as Jean-Paul Sartre would have it, to be selves who exist ‘in the perpetual mode of

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detachment from what is’, whereby the self finds itself to be an ultimate nothingness and, in that realisation, feels most like themselves. What Iago exhibits is a ‘reflexive’ model of selfhood—one which Charles Taylor might identify as being fashioned in response to ‘a reflexive turn … which intensifies our sense of inwardness and depth’—which establishes itself by negating the ipseic fixity that the claim ‘I am’ designates. ‘I am not what I am’, therefore, because ‘I am not’ an ‘I am’, at all. This is a subject that resists such subjective stability and singularity. For Iago, as for Goodwin, ‘I am’ cannot contain both ‘mee’ and ‘Mee’. If in ‘I am not what I am’ Iago ‘provides a succinct description of tragic subjectivity’, as Garrett A. Sullivan Jr. suggests, so too does he provide a succinct description of the proto-modern, ecstatic subject: knowingly beside himself and enjoying his model of coalesced detachment.

‘I am not what I am’: Iago has mastered the art of losing control, of constituting himself via displacement, and spends the play encouraging others into his rhetorical structure. Having gestured towards the significance of Iago’s ecstatic claim, this discussion now turns to observe its echoes that reverberate throughout the text as Iago ventures to induct other characters into ecstatically distracted plurality. Informed by critics such as Michael Neill who suggest that Othello suffers ‘a violent induction into this new discourse of interiority’, and Janet Adelman, who has observed the ‘extent to which [Iago] works to replicate his own self-division in Othello’, I shall consider how the representations of ecstatic experience in this play are at a remove from those we have seen thus far in this study. Here, in the hands of Iago, ecstasy is less a means of achieving interpersonal experience whereby two become one, than it is a demonstration of how

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56 Taylor, The Sources of the Self, p. 480.
such relationships can fracture the single subject into two.\textsuperscript{58} Furthermore, I consider how the play represents these dynamics of fracture in medical terms: first by considering how Cassio’s ‘unhappy brains’ contribute to his self-fracture, before moving to explore Othello’s ecstasy in the epileptic terms with which the play conflates it. Ecstasy, a state that has elsewhere in this study been attained via the divine or the beloved, will now be considered as a state that could be artificially inflicted onto others, and which could have profound physical and physiological consequences. Informed by Michael Schoenfeldt’s assertion that ‘temper’ belongs to ‘the earlier lexicon of the self’, the remaining discussion observes the distempered subject that, displaced from this lexicon, is estranged from itself.\textsuperscript{59}


\textsuperscript{59} Schoenfeldt, \textit{Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England}, p. 7.
III. ‘UNHAPPY BRAINS’: DRINKING TOWARDS DUALITY

Some wine, ho!

*And let me the cannikin clink, clink,*

*And let me the cannikin clink*

*A soldier’s a man;*

*O man’s life’s but a span—*

*Why then let a soldier drink.*

Some wine, boys!

(Oth., II.iii.63-8)

If the mind is to attain height, writes Montaigne in his essay ‘Of Drunkenness’, it ‘must quit-it[self] and raise hir-selfe a loft, and taking the bridle in hir teeth, carrie and transporte hir man so farre, that afterward he wonder at himselfe, and rest amazed at his actions’. Montaigne here articulates alcohol’s ability to facilitate the act of self-departure, and considers the extent to which wine allows and encourages the subject to take an intoxicated step beyond itself. But while he may be intrigued by associations between drunken excess and the experience of spiritual ecstasy—both of which this study has understood to enable the subject to stand outside themselves—Montaigne is no advocate of drunken experience: ‘drunkennesse … appeareth to mee a grose and brutish vice’:

Other vices but alter and distract the understanding, whereas this utterly subverteth the same, and astonieth the body. … The worst estate of man, is where he looseth the knowledge and governemen of himselfe. And amongst other things, it is said, that as must wine boyling and working in a vessell, workes and sends upward what ever it containeth in the bottome, so doth wine cause those that drinke excessively of it, [to] worke up, and breake out their most concealed secrets.

Drinking, in these terms, causes us to lose knowledge and control of ourselves. While borrowing the central dynamics of ecstasy—‘send[ing] upward’, ‘work[ing] up’, and enabling that which is contained to ‘breake out’—this experience is at a remove from the spiritual experiences considered earlier in this study. We saw in the Bacchic revelry of

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60 Montaigne, II.2.192.
61 Ibid., II.2.187-8.
Chapter One, for instance, how alcohol provided both an opportunity for unity, but could also occasion violent loss of self; wine is a ‘galvanic substance’, as Roland Barthes terms it, which could be at once both profoundly inspirational and informative, as well as violently destructive.62 Throughout this thesis, ecstasy has demonstrated itself as a double-edged experience, and alcohol has shown its capacity to readily transport the subject in either direction: alcohol, very simply, is a catalyst for the ecstatic experience, for better or for worse. ‘Beware of drink’, warns divine Samuel Speed, because ‘where drunkenness reigns, reason is an exile’.63 ‘That quaffing and drinking will undo you’, Maria cautions Sir Toby in Twelfth Night (I.iii.13). While ‘we may maintain drunkennesse to bee profitable’, then, so too must we be aware that this ‘distempering draught’ (Oth., I.i.100) has the potential to ‘undo’ and ‘distemper’ its consumers.

The fine line between ecstatic connectivity and ecstatic self-abjection, between an experience that is blissfully social and one that is painfully individual, is central to the presentation of drinking in Act Two, Scene Three of Othello. Obeying the entreat of the Herald in the previous scene—‘it is Othello’s pleasure … that … every man put himself into triumph’ in celebration of both the ‘perdition of the Turkish fleet’ and Othello’s ‘nuptial[s]’ (II.ii.1-7)—Iago encourages Cassio to raise a glass and join the friendly ‘night of revels’ (40) enjoyed by their fellow comrades: ‘happiness to their sheets! … to the health of black Othello’ (28-9). ‘This custom of health drinking’, writes Rebecca Lemon, who considers the treatment of drinking in this scene in light of what she identifies as the play’s broader representation of issues of addiction, ‘was a prevalent one, associated with male communities bound in political-military unity’.64 At the outset of the scene, then,

drinking is presented as a means to achieving social unity and celebration. But when Cassio articulates alcohol’s adverse effects—‘I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking’ (30-1)—Iago’s insistence upon these rituals is no longer about achieving social harmony, but instead becomes an attempt to capitalise on the violent ecstasy that such drinking can produce. In philosopher and Protestant divine William Ames’ terms, Iago knows that ‘drunkennesse doe consist in the loss of the use of reason by drinking’, and it is with this notion that he translates his seemingly kind offer—‘come, lieutenant, I have a stoup of wine’ (26-7)—into unkind motivation.65

If I can fasten but one cup upon him,
With that which he hath drunk tonight already,
He’ll be as full of quarrel and offence …
Now ‘mongst this flock of drunkards
Am I to put our Cassio in some action
That may offend the isle.

Venturing to manipulate Cassio’s ‘infirmity’ to satisfy his own ends, Iago ventures to ‘fluster’ Cassio ‘with flowing cups’ and cause him to lose himself ‘‘mongst [a] flock of drunkards’ (II.iii.2; 35; 37-8).

Cassio has ‘unhappy brains for drinking’, not simply because he is ‘unfortunate in the infirmity’, but because drinking makes the brain unhappy. As a number of early modern writers confirm, ‘excessive drinking of wyne’ can ‘troble & distemper the brain & judgement of the drinker’, for wine gives ‘the braine a blow’ and ‘spoyles the brain’.66

In his *Methode of Phisick*, Philip Barrough goes as far as to draw parallels between drinking and conditions such as apoplexy:

The Apoplexie is caused of a flegmaticke humour, that is cold, grosse and tough, which doth at one time abundantly fill the principall ventricles of the braine,

3-20.
which humour ouermuch crudities, and chiefly dronckennes doth engender. Also it is caused by a fall or a blow which shaketh & bruiseth the braine, and causeth humours to flowe thither.\(^67\)

Drinking violently affects, disturbs, and distempers the brain. Observing how ‘the vapour of wine mount[ed] up into the brain’, Italian writer Tomaso Garzoni discusses in a chapter ‘Of Drunken Fooles’ how wine could ‘overwhelm’ the subject, ‘taking from a man sight, knowledge, and judgement … in an instant’.\(^68\) Pierre de la Primaudaye asserts the stakes as being even higher:

> Wine is hurtful for the braine, for the marrow of the back bone, and the sinewes that grow out of it. Whereby it falleth out, that this principall part beeing hurt, there succeede in time, great and dangerous maladies thereup, to wit, the apoplexie, the falling evil, the palse, shakings, numbness of members, convulsions, giddines of the head, shrinking of joints, the incubus, the catalepsia, lethargie, frensie, rheumes, deafenes, blindenes, and shrinking of mouth and lips.\(^69\)

Perhaps influenced by theories of ‘Galen’ that ‘by drunkennesse commeth astonishment of the brayne, the Falling sicknesse, or some maybe either to Sense or Motion’, these writers establish the extent to which drinking could damage the subject.\(^70\) To situate the representation of drinking in this scene alongside this medical framework, therefore, is to observe that wine is no longer the inspiring, divine substance that was depicted in Chapter One. As the effects of wine are diagnosed in terms of ‘dangerous maladie’, examined in relation to their effect on the brain, these discourses bring into focus how the experience of ‘being beside oneself’ was depicted in medical terms. Acknowledging the capacity of the ‘distempering draught’ to alter his temper, that he has ‘unhappy brains’ for this substance that was itself understood to make the brain unhappy, Cassio articulates the ecstasy of intoxication not as an opportunity for happy union or social bonding, but

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\(^67\) Barrough, p. 25.
rather as an intensely physical and physiological experience.

Drinking, very simply, makes Cassio unhappy, and it is this unhappiness that causes him to lose himself. For if, as Sara Ahmed asserts in her consideration of happiness as an affective state, ‘happiness ... puts us into intimate contact with things’, then Cassio’s unhappy disposition—disposed towards unhappiness—signals a move in the opposite direction: not towards cohesion, but towards fracture.71 The lexicon of ‘hap’, as well denoting moments of chance and fortune (as, for instance in ‘happenstance’, or ‘haply’), is often also involved in issues of contact and proximity: ‘haptic’ involves touch, to ‘hap’ or ‘happen’ can be to ‘to take possession’ or to seize something (OED, v. 3). ‘To be “hap-py”’, Langley observes, ‘is to be coincident—hap—in unmediated contact’.72 In this sense, ecstasy has been, throughout this study, an experience that drives the subject towards such ‘hap-py’ moments: of union with the divine or beloved, or a moment where subjects feel might more ‘in touch’ with the world around them. For Cassio, however, we see the inverse: the ecstasy of intoxication makes him ‘un-hap-py’: he does not happily coincide with himself, nor does he find himself in ‘intimate contact with things’, but rather comes to violent blows with Montano:

MONTANO What’s the matter, lieutenant?
CASSIO A knave teach me my duty? I’ll beat the knave into a twiggen bottle!
RODERIGO Beat me?
CASSIO Dost thou prate, rogue?
MONTANO Nay, good lieutenant! I pray, sir, hold your hand.
CASSIO Let me go, sir, or I’ll knock you o’er the mazzard.
MONTANO Come, come, you’re drunk.
CASSIO Drunk? [They Fight] (142-52)

While Viola is ‘happy’ at the end of Twelfth Night because ‘place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump’ (Vi.251-2), Cassio’s unhappiness renders him in-coherently ‘drunk’ and

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72 Eric Langley, Shakespeare’s Contagious Sympathies, p. 11.
‘speak[ing] parrot’ (275). Cassio’s ‘unhappy brains’ lead him to these un-hap-py actions, as drinking brings him to blows with others: actions that will in turn only intensify his unhappiness. Like the ‘unhappy’ Antipholus at the outset of *The Comedy of Errors*, Cassio’s incoherent unhappiness will similarly cause him to ‘lose [him]self’ (*Err.*, I.i.40).

As Cassio attempts to assert his authority over Iago—reminding him that ‘the lieutenant | Is to be saved before the ensign’—while also maintaining control of himself—‘I am not drunk now … you must not think, then, that I am drunk’ (*Oth.*, 101-2; 106; 109-10)—Iago exploits Cassio’s ‘unhappy’ disposition. Craving Cassio’s lieutenancy, Iago seeks to dis-place Cassio in order to take the place that he considers to be rightfully his. Cassio’s claims that ‘I am not drunk’ are therefore met with Iago’s counter that ‘he’ll watch the horoloc[e] a double set | If drink rock not his cradle’ (121-2), a claim that seeks to sever Cassio from his ‘reputation’ and cause it to be ‘lost without deserving’ (260-1). Exploiting the fact that Cassio is ‘unfortunate in the infirmity’ (38), Iago inducts Cassio into his model of self-fracture by eroding ‘the immortal part of [him]self’, employing the ‘invisible spirit of wine’ to ‘steal[s] away his brains’ (131; 254; 271; 279-80). Where Cassio laments ‘that men should put an enemy in their mouths and thus ‘transform ourselves into beasts’ (265-6; 267-8), an alehouse critic like Richard Young—anatomising the problem of drunkards and the evils of drink in his jeremiad *The Drunkard’s Character* (1638)—would argue that ‘drunkards are worse then beasts, in that beasts remaine the same they were created; whereas Drunkards … suffer themselves to be transformed by drinke into swine’.73 ‘I have lost the immortal part of myself—and what remains is bestial’ (259-60); pouring drink down Cassio’s throat, Iago supplants his own unhappiness onto this ‘unfortunate’ subject, and demonstrates just how easily his

73 Young, p. 14 (my emphasis). George Evans Light notes Young’s tome as having the final word in the Renaissance debate surrounding the problem of drunkard and drinking, which had begun with Gosson’s *The School of Abuse* (1578), in ‘Drunken Politics: Alcohol, Alehouses, and Theater in England, 1555-1700’ (PhD thesis, Stanford University, 1994), p. 8.
own experience of self-fracture can be inflicted on to others.

With drinking, as with the ecstasies explored elsewhere in this study, comes the potential for transformation. ‘I am not drunk now: I can | Stand well enough’ (106-7): ‘swagger[ing]’ (270) in his drunken state Cassio is unable to balance ‘T’ and ‘I’, signifiers that lack stability because their dizzied referent cannot stand still. It is in this way that this ‘voluable’ (II.i.236), changeable, subject is translated from ‘a sensible man, by and by’ to ‘a fool, and presently a beast—O strange!’ (281). The ‘sinne which cracks mens credits’ is, therefore, felt particularly strongly by Cassio, as cracks start to show in his ipseic foundations; as Young would put it, ‘hee looseth his credit and good name, for drunkennes defames a man, and takes away his reputation’.74 As Cassio laments accordingly: ‘Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation’ (258-9). By a drink that ‘dislikes’ him, Cassio is estranged from himself—‘how comes it, Michael, you are thus forgot?’ (197)—to the point where he is no longer like himself, and no longer likes himself: ‘one unperfectness shows me another to make me frankly despi-se myself’ (285-6). Having successfully dis-placed Cassio—‘never more be officer of mine’ (240), asserts Othello, woken by the drunken revelry—Iago works towards making that place his own: ‘now thou art my lieutenant’ (II.iii.478), Othello will later assert. Alcohol has, as Speed warned above, exiled Cassio from himself, and like the loving subjects of the previous chapter he grieves the distance, desperately trying to get back to and recover himself: ‘I will ask him [Othello] for my place again’ (291). If it was loss of place that brought about Iago’s self-fracture, it is apt, an unhappy co-incidence, that Cassio’s self-fracture now causes him to lose his place.

While Iago might be able to balance a protean model of ecstatic plurality (‘I am not what I am’), Cassio’s unhappy self-estrangement forces him not into Iago’s reflexive

74 Young, p. 27; 66.
model, but rather into a violent state of self-loss. Compared to the plastic Iago, able to maintain and constitute himself through the experience of fracture, Cassio is friable and brittle. Cassio might not know the subjective flex that drunkenness facilitates, but Iago does: ‘good wine is a good familiar creature | If used well’ (296-7). Under the influence of both alcohol and Iago, Cassio’s sense of self is shattered. Like wine, to appropriate from Barthes, Iago is a converting substance, having ‘at [his] disposal apparently plastic powers’ that can drive the play’s subjects into ecstatic fracture. Iago demonstrates how easily the dynamics of ecstasy can be thrown into discord, how easily self-knowledge can be corrupted, and how easily the subject can be distempered.

Having considered how Cassio’s ‘unhappy brains’ make him vulnerable to a negative, physiological ecstasis, an experience of self-loss rather than self-location, this discussion moves to consider the fracture that Iago inflicts upon Othello in similarly medical terms. If, as R. R. Simpson suggests, ‘the use of a medical situation to enhance dramatic effect is an absorbing theme worth more detailed study’, then what follows reads Othello’s ‘ecstasy’ (IV.i.80) alongside medical treatises of epilepsy in order to suggest the extent to which Shakespeare’s conflation of these states creates a moment that reflects the play’s larger concerns about subjectivity and integrity.

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75 *Mythologies*, p. 58.
Earthquakes and falling sickness have the same causes. Falling sickness is not a disease coming from nature in its regular course, or from ill health in the organism of destruction of the humors, but solely from the same causes as earthquakes, for the motion of the earth is also the motion of man and is experienced by all which grows on the earth. … If the living spirit boils due to faults in its properties, it produces vapors which make the whole body tremble.

CASSIUS When the fit was on him, I did mark | how he did shake…

Lost in a corporeal storm, as Paracelsus has it, the epileptic subject is disrupted by internal eruptions; vulnerable to its environmental surround, it trembles, loses control and, as is described above, suffers internal fracture as the storm rages. Behind this metaphor lies the notion that the body operates as a microcosm of the world; ‘earthquakes and falling sickness have the same causes’ for, as John Donne has it, ‘every Man is a little world’. Indeed, believed to have been composed of the same chemical principles—mercury, sulphur and salt—storm and body were seen to operate in much the same way; both exist in a state of flux, at risk to external influence:

For a while the body of a thunderstorm is surrounded by a shell or skin, and as long as the body remains whole, the effect of mercury, sulphur and salt remains enclosed in it. But when the time comes, thunder disrupts its shell and breaks

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77 John Donne, *The First Sermon Preached to King Charles* (London: by Augustine Mathewes, 1625), p. 29. While ancient notions of man as microcosm or little world were very much still in circulation, this is not to suggest that they were not also being challenged. In *The Advancement of Learning*, for instance, Francis Bacon accuses ‘Paracelsus, and the Alchimists’ of straining the idea ‘as if there were to be found in mans body certaine correspondences, & parallells, which shold haue respect to all varieties of things, as starres, planets, minerals, which are extant in the great world’ (London: by Thomas Purfoot and Thomas Creede, 1605), p. 39. David Hoeniger compellingly considers the relationship between inner and outer storms in *King Lear in Medicine and Shakespeare in the English Renaissance* (London: Associated University Presses, 1992), pp. 331-8.

78 This was a metaphor that cut both ways; the earthquake that ruined the city of Cyzicum (the ‘Rome of Asia’), for instance, is described by Peter Heylyn as ‘the falling Sicknesse of the East’ in his *Cosmographie in Four Bookes* (London: for Henry Seile, 1652), p. 20. The body also provides a metaphor for thinking about the causes of earthquakes for Arthur Golding in his *Discourse vpon the Earthquake*, produced ‘by windes gotten into the bowels of the earth … [which] shake the earth for want of sufficient vent to issue out at’ (London: by Henry Binneman, 1580), sig. Biv.
The subject must therefore remain closed off, contained and hermetic, if the storm is to be constrained. For while sulphur lies dormant in the body, it may be ignited by an outside force and produce vapours which, ‘communicated to the brain’, stupefy the senses and throw the subject into ‘Epilepsie, and trembling’:

Paracelsus … doth oft-times define a Feaver to be an Earth-quake of the Microcosm; which trembling of the earth, he sometimes defines, to be our Falling-sickness. … He defineth a Feaver to be a Disease of Sulphur and Nitre; boasting, that the Cause, and also the Remedy, are in that his essential definition.

Writing of his Select Observations on English Bodies (1657), Shakespeare’s son-in-law John Hall notes three cases of patients ‘troubled with the Falling Sickness’. In the case of ‘MR. Fortiscue aged 20’, Hall prescribes his patient a course of opiates on June 5th, 1623, before drawing an ounce of blood the following day, by which means ‘he was in a short time cured’. In this, as Stephanie Moss has noted, Hall prescribes ‘the cure suggested by Paracelsus to calm the traumatic corporeal storm’. Similarly obeying Paracelsus—noting that ‘the Galenists’, by contrast, ‘flatter and palliate the diseases, but they do not cure them, which the experience of the cure of the Falling-sickness doth testify’—an anonymous physician informs his readers of a cure for the Falling Sickness (‘the remedies [being] fourfold’) to be found in ‘the seed extracted of Piony & Poppy’.

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82 Hall, p. 37.
84 Anon., The Method of Chemical Philosophie and Pysick (London: by J[ohn] G[rismond], 1664), p. 135; 136; 137. The preface is signed with the Greek characters ‘Philahathou’. Elizabeth Lane
There is, however, little hope of a cure for Shakespeare’s epileptic sufferer. For Iago’s ‘dangerous conceits’, which ‘with a little act upon the blood, ... like the mines of sulphur’ (327-31), work in much the same way as the ‘acrid’ vapours that cause ‘a perturbation of the brain.’\(^{85}\) As Crooke confirms: ‘Epilepsy is caused when the blood is disquited and defiled in the veines’.\(^{86}\) Slowly eroding Othello’s sense and reason with decentring words that push him ‘to [his] compass’ (\textit{Ham.}, III.iii.357), to his limits, Iago’s poisonous words muddle and destabilise the Moor as he collapses into dizzying prose:

Lie with her? Lie on her? We say lie on her when they belie her! Lie with her, zounds, that’s fulsome!—Handkerchief! confessions! handkerchief!?—To confess, and be hanged for his labour! First to be hanged and then to confess: \textit{I tremble at it} ... It is not words that \textit{shakes} me thus ... \[He] falls in a trance.\(^{87}\)

\[ IV.i.35-42, \text{emphasis added} \]

\textit{I tremble at it}... his body vibrating, his substance unsettled, Othello is no longer ‘the noble Moor, whom passion could not shake’ (IV.i.258). For as Iago’s ‘medicine’ sets in, ‘bloody passion’ begins to ‘shake ... [Othello’s] very frame’ (V.ii.45), pushing him to his bodily limits as he simultaneously suffers the external force of the words that Iago crams into his ears, and the internal pressure of ‘the lethargy [which] must have his quiet course’. ‘If not’, asserts Iago, adopting a diagnostic role in a play that lacks doctors or medics, ‘he foams at mouth’ (49-50).

Othello’s fit is, to my knowledge, one of only three to occur on the early modern stage. Elsewhere, in Ben Jonson’s \textit{The Devil is an Ass} (first performed 1616) and \textit{Volpone} (1606), characters depict this altered state. In both instances, these fits are feigned and

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\(^{86}\) Crooke, p. 500.

\(^{87}\) The dramatic effect of the sudden switch from verse to prose, as Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern observe in their discussion of ‘Verse/Prose’, tends to occur, for tragic characters, ‘at moments of mental and social disintegration’—\textit{Shakespeare in Parts} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 332-9 (332).
used to comic effect. In *Volpone*, Voltore feigns being possessed by a demonic parasite, and in Act V, Scene xii, the eponymous Volpone (disguised) orchestrates the fit’s manifestation in front of an audience:

**VOLPONE**

> They said, you were possessed; fall down, and seem so:  
> I'll help to make it good. [Voltore falls.]—God bless the man!  
> [aside] Stop your wind hard, and swell.—See, see, see, see!  
> He vomits crooked pins! His eyes are set,  
> Like a dead hares, hung in a poulter’s shop!  
> His mouth’s running away! Do you see, signior?  
> Now 'tis in his belly.

Voltores falls when he is told, comes too when he is told—‘Look! he comes to himself!’ (33)—and articulates his return to self in familiar terms: ‘Where am I?’ (34). As Volpone highlights various symptoms and other characters ‘reinforce the effect, the audience is’, as Alan C. Dessen considers, ‘treated to one of the funniest scenes in the play’. In *The Devil Is An Ass*, by contrast, Fitzdottrel is the author of his own feigned seizure:

> [Fitzdottrel] begins his fit.  
> **FITZDOTTRELL**
> Gi’me some garlic, garlic, garlic, garlic.  
> **MEREcroft**
> Hark, the poor Gentlemen, how he is tormented!  
> **FITZDOTTRELL**
> My Wife is a Whore, I’ll kiss her no more: and why?  
> May’st not thou be a Cuckold, as well as I?  
> Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, &c.  
> **SIR Pol**
> That is the Devil that speaks, and laughs in him.

In this lengthy ‘fit’, his observers—many of whom are in on the trick—note ‘how he changes’, ‘how he foams!’ and ‘swells!’, and ‘give him more Soap to foam with’ (69). Using ‘a little castle-soap’ (V.ii.3), Fitzdorrel mimics both the physic effects of seizure, as well as other commonplace traits such as inarticulate stammers—‘buzz, buzz, buzz, buzz’; ‘O, O’; ‘Hum!’; ‘Yellow, yellow, yellow, yellow, &c.’ (46; 48; 72; 74)—and speaking in foreign tongues

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(a feature of some prophetic trances known as ‘glossolalia’). Both plays, therefore, employ commonplace markers of these fits, feigning demonic possession in order to achieve comic effect.

Othello’s genuine seizure, by contrast, intensifies the tragedy. The play’s interest and investment in this altered state, and the desire to diagnose it, is evidenced by the significant alterations to this speech between its appearance in the 1622 Quarto (Q1), and its reproduction in the First Folio (F1) the following year.

**Q1:**

Lie with her, lie on her? We say lie on her, when they bely her; lye with her, Zouns, that’s fulsome, handkerchers, Confession, hankerchers.  

_He falls downe._

**F1:**

Lye with her? lye on her? We say lye on her, when they be-lye-her. Lye with her: that’s fullsome: Handkerchiefe: Confessions: Handkerchiefe. To confesse, and be hang’d for his labour. First, to be hang’d, and then to confesse: I tremble at it. Nature would not invest her selfe in such shadowing passion, without some Instruction. It is not words that shakes me thus, (pish) Noses, Eares, and Lippes: is’t possible. Confesse? Handkerchiefe? O divell.

_Falls in a Traunce._

In F1, the speech is expanded to include references to Othello’s physical state, including references to trembling and shaking, and furthermore the additional clarification that when ‘he falls downe’ (Q1), it is ‘in a Traunce’ (F1). In this, it is almost as though Ralph Crane, the scribe who is generally taken to have prepared _Othello_ for publication in the Folio, felt compelled to diagnose Othello’s fall, rescripting a fall into a moment of tranced

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91 See Screech, _Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly_, p. 85.
92 These trance moments were explored in combination with a series of Shakespearean ‘altered states’, including Othello’s fit, in a workshop co-run by me and James Wallace at the 2017 Oxford-Globe Forum (see Appendix).
93 Shakespeare, _The Tragedy of Othello_ (London: by Nicholas Okes, 1622), p. 62
95 Palfrey and Stern consider the first ‘handkerchers’ in Q1 as a cue-word into Othello’s epileptic fit, and find this cue to be lacking in F1—_Shakespeare in Parts_, p. 229.
altered consciousness. The critical compulsion to diagnose this condition, as we will see below, is one shared by the text itself, creating a moment that, as the above versions of the scene demonstrate, straddles the medical and the non-medical. Unlike the feigned trances in Jonson’s plays, Shakespeare uses this trance moment in order to mark a moment of irrecoverable subjective fracture, such that will ultimately be expressed in Othello’s assertion that ‘that’s he that was Othello; here I am’ (V.ii.282); as Kiernan Ryan notes, ‘the entire tragedy is contained in the gulf that divides those two pronouns’. What the remainder of this chapter considers, therefore, are the intersections between identity and this altered state of consciousness. For Othello’s epileptic body, as Iago diagnoses it—which will receive further treatment in due course—is, in both Q1 and F1, also curiously ecstatic: ‘I … laid good ’scuse upon your ecstasy’ (IV.i.74-5), Iago tells Othello when he returns to himself.

In Chapter One, critical works by Gail Kern Paster and Tanya Pollard contributed to a sense of ecstasy as a state that was more commonly experienced by the open, vulnerable and, consequently, female subject. In this sense, the language of ecstasy could be gendered, as seen here in Iago’s claim that Othello has exhibited in his trance ‘a passion most unsuiting of a man’ (78). Elsewhere, in Julius Caesar, epilepsy is used as a metaphor for political weakness, as Cassius reports Caesar to have suffered a fit in Spain and details how ‘this god did shake … as a sick girl … I did mark | How he did shake’ (I.ii.122-31). In these circumstances, to use epilepsy as an ‘’scuse’ for ecstasy has the deliberate effect of undermining Othello’s strength, as both a man and as a military leader, to Cassio. What interests me in what follows, however, is the affinity between these

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96 Ryan, *Shakespeare*, p. 89.
two states, and what might prompt, and allow, Iago to conflate these altered states of consciousness. If ecstasy was, in the previous chapter, observed in the trembling pleasures of erotic rapture, it is here translated into the convulsive tremors of medical seizure. ‘When the time comes, thunder disrupts its shell and breaks forth’: Othello is our bursting shell, and like so many of the ecstatic subjects seen throughout this study, we mark how he breaks forth.

That Iago describes Othello’s ‘trance’ as both ‘epilepsy’ and ‘ecstasy’, the only instance of these states being conflated on the early modern stage, has received little critical attention. For the most part, this is owing to the lack of evidence for the former diagnosis, unless, as Sujata Iyengar notes in her exploration of Shakespeare’s medical language, ‘we take [Othello’s] headache as a migrainous aura preceding the attack’ rather than a symbolic implication of his supposed cuckoldom.98 Furthermore, she writes, ‘Iago appears to be bolstering outdated associations among epilepsy, madness, and hysteria, confirmed by his anticipation of Othello’s “savage madness” if disturbed before the fit outlives its course’.99 Hoeniger’s conclusion concerning Othello’s fit similarly discredits the episode as an epileptic one, asserting that ‘Othello’s fit is merely a short-lived trance caused by his overwrought emotional state’, supporting his diagnosis with the claim that ‘Shakespeare knew the symptoms of epilepsy, and that they do not suddenly appear because a man is overcome with passion’.100 And yet, as Stephanie Moss argues, ‘epilepsy does appear precisely because the individual is overcome with emotion’, thus suggesting the trance to be an embodiment of emotional excess which would support Iago’s later assertion that the Moor, ‘o’erwhelmed with … passion’ (IV.i.72-3), suffered ecstasy.101 In Moss’ medical reading, Othello’s epilepsy, ‘whether or not Iago’s diagnosis is correct’, is

98 Iyengar, p. 121.
99 Iyengar, p. 121.
100 Hoeniger, p. 204.
101 Moss, ‘Reading Epilepsy in Othello’, p. 97.
representative of ‘the pinnacle of [Iago’s] manipulations’, a state that marks Othello’s shift ‘from a subject to an object, from an assimilated black man to an outsider’. Understood in these terms, epilepsy figures as an experience of radical alienation and expulsion, not only from self, but also from society. Where diagnostic readings of the play have previously focused on and taken issue with Iago’s claim that ‘my lord is in an epilepsy’, the following is more interested in placing this assertion alongside Iago’s subsequent claim that this was simply a cover, an ‘excuse [laid] upon [Othello’s] ecstasy’. In so doing, I will suggest how the conflation of these two states reflects the play’s central issues concerning identity and selfhood. To view these states in tandem provides a lens through which we might better understand the significance of Othello’s moment of violent physic fracture.

i) DIAGNOSING TRANCES IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

In one of the few studies that has considered the affinity between ecstasy and epilepsy, Jesús López-Peláez Casellas touches on Othello’s epilepsy as ecstatic, but does so more as a means to reject the former diagnosis than to develop it; ‘Othello experiences an uncontrollable sexual arousal’, he writes, that ‘leads not necessarily to an epileptic fit … but to an episode that resembles an orgasm’. The term ‘ecstasy’ here is sexually rather than medically charged. But, as Helkiah Crooke hinted in the previous chapter, epileptic

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fit and sexual orgasm need not be treated as distinct categories. In fact, it is the ecstasy of ‘natural pleasure in generation’ that binds them together:

For were it not that the God of Nature hath placed herein so incredible a sting or rage of pleasure, as whereby wee are transported for a time as it were out of our selves … and wee overtaken with an extasie, which Hippocrates calleth a little Epilepsie or falling sicksse.\(^\text{104}\)

Ecstasy and epilepsy are here one and the same, and Crooke is not alone in his identification of a similarity between the two. Variously described as a state which is ‘divine, demonic, pathological, and geohumoral’, one which ‘philosophers and physicians alike have struggled to determine [the] nature and significance [of]’, discussions of epilepsy suggest the state to be just as enigmatic as ecstasy.\(^\text{105}\) But the relationship between these two states extends further, for not only are they similarly problematic when it comes to classification, but they are similar in their very nature; just as ‘sense to ecstasy were ne’er so thralled’ for Hamlet (II.i.74), epilepsy similarly takes both sense and the senses into thraldom, ‘the whole bodye [being] depriued of sense and motion’.\(^\text{106}\) Both ‘import a distraction of the senses, a violent alienation of the mind’; both throw the subject beside itself.\(^\text{107}\) There is, it seems, little to be distinguished between a subject ‘falling into Trances and Ecstasies’ and those who ‘lye in Trances like men having the falling sickness’: those who in ‘wild extasies’ suffer the ‘swelling of their bodies and foaming at the mouth’ and ‘they that are in a swoune [and] foaming under a Epilepsie’.\(^\text{108}\)

It is not surprising, therefore, that these tranced states were, for a number of early modern writers, inextricably linked and often prone to conflation: ‘I pray what is the

\(^{104}\) Crooke, p. 200

\(^{105}\) Hobgood, np.

\(^{106}\) Crooke, p. 500.

\(^{107}\) Meric Casaubon, p. 81.

difference between a *Trance*, & a *fainting* or *swooning*, asks Meric Casaubon, from whom we shall hear more presently, explaining that ‘there is so much affinity, that the words may probably be confounded sometimes’.109 For Casaubon, as for a number of others of both medical and theological disciplines, this was precisely the problem. As Allison P Hobgood notes in her consideration of Julius Caesar’s ‘falling sickness’, ‘with increased conversion of the populace to Christianity, epilepsy’s connections to divine prophecy … and ecstatic possession became more pronounced’, with medieval Christianity ‘recasting … epileptic fits as divine ecstasy’.110 In much the same way, with increased medical examination and interest concerning the cause and nature of epilepsy, ecstasy began to take on a medical identity, and would later earn its place under an index of ‘distempers of the brain’, in a chapter on ‘Inward Diseases, and Distempers of the Body’ in alderman Randle Holme’s encyclopaedic endeavour, *The Academie of Armorie* (1688).111 In short, the lines between natural and numinous ecstasy were blurred: lines which Casaubon—asserting ‘every true, natural, and perfect ecstasie, to be a degree or species of epilepsie’—would seek to clarify by re-situating conceptions of the ecstatic experience among discussions of disease.112 In these circumstances, the textual changes to *Othello* outlined above are reflective of a broader compulsion to diagnose these altered states: states which, as the ‘little deaths’ in the previous chapter demonstrated, simultaneously captured and evaded the early modern medical imagination.

Casaubon makes his endeavour explicitly clear: ‘of Religious *Enthusiasme*, truly and really religious’, he tells his reader, ‘nothing will be found here’.113 As its full title would suggest, Casaubon’s *Treatise concerning Enthusiasm as It is an Effect of Nature: but is*
mistaken by many for either Divine Inspiration, or Diabolicall Possession departs from religious discussions of enthusiasm. Instead, it seeks to establish the extent to which his readers might more properly understand what has been mistaken for divinely inspired enthusiasm (and the ecstatic condition with which he closely aligns it) as ‘proceed[ing] from naturall causes’. As we saw in Chapter One, the relationship between enthusiasm and ecstasy extends back to notions of frenzy in Phaedrus, where such states of extremis were taken as divine gifts to be clearly distinguished from madness brought about by disease. But, for Casaubon, these distinctions are less clear-cut: ‘for what if all these pretend enthusiasticall Divinations,’ he asks, ‘by Oracles, or other ways, were but mere Gulleries and Impostures to get money … and to amaze credulous and superstitious people?’ What if moments of enthusiasm and ecstasy could simply be feigned for financial gain? Could these states be brought about by other (natural) means and mistaken for true divine inspiration? Could ecstasy be voluntary? Though he does not deny that states like enthusiasm and ecstasy exist, Casaubon’s Treatise displays a scepticism as to the veracity of claims of divine possession, in particular those found in The Life of Sister Katherine of Jesus (1628). This text, notes Paul J. Korshin, ‘is little more than an attempt, obviously fostered by the Jesuit party in France, to persuade potential converts by the inspired quality of the Catholic faithful’. Suspicious of its supernatural claims and, as an Anglican scholar, to some extent biased against its French Catholic author, Casaubon expresses his philosophical doubts of the source, doubts which would govern his tone of enquiry in his Treatise:

I found the book to be a long contexture of several strange raptures and enthusiasms, that had hapned unto a melancholick, or if you will, a devout Maid. In this I saw no great matter of wonder: Neither could I observe much in the relation of the particulars, but what as I conceived, rationally, probable; so I might believe, charitably, true. I could observe, as I thought, a perpetuall coherence of

114 Casaubon, p. 36. Casaubon takes care, however, not to discredit genuine inspiration through his discussions of the counterfeit.
115 Casaubon, p. 30.
naturally causes, in every particular; which gave me good satisfaction.\textsuperscript{117} In coming to write his \textit{Treatise}, Casaubon engages in a number of discussions that sought to highlight and examine the widening gap between medical and religious perceptions of claimed possessions. The Doctor’s claims in \textit{Macbeth} that the Queen’s ‘disease is beyond my practice’, and that ‘more needs she the divine than the physician’ (Vi.52; 67) in many ways reflect the uncertainty among early modern physicians and theologians alike when diagnosing cases of possession.

These anxieties about diagnosis were more pronounced with regards to the medical theory surrounding female pathologies, with possessed and hysterical subjects demonstrating similar ‘symptoms’. In early modern England, such concerns manifested themselves in cases such as that of Mary Glover: a fourteen-year-old suffering from a seemingly incurable disease. As Michael MacDonald notes in his study of Glover’s affliction and the intersections between discourses of witchcraft and hysteria:

\begin{quote}
As the doctors were trying and failing to diagnose and cure Mary Glover, her fits became more regular, more spectacular and more frightening … Glover also fell into trance-like states and suffered contortions every time she ate. Her extraordinary fits occurred whenever she was in the company of Elizabeth Jackson … [and] became a kind of show. … The house was jammed with people … [it] had become a kind of theatre.\textsuperscript{118}
\end{quote}

Whether Glover was suffering from organic illness or demonic possession was ultimately decided in court, with Edward Jorden, a member of the College of Physicians, unable to suggest a cure for her disease: ‘it is not naturally’, ruled Sir Edmund Anderson, the presiding judge of the case.\textsuperscript{119} But when Jorden came to write his \textit{Briefe Discourse on the Suffocation of the Mother} in 1603—less than a year after the Glover trial—he would note the cases of a number of women ‘in the fit of the Mother, that was besides her selfe’ and

\textsuperscript{117} Casaubon, ‘To the Reader’, sig. A3v.
\textsuperscript{119} Cit. Kaara L. Peterson, ‘Performing Arts: Hysterical Disease, Exorcism, and Shakespeare’s Theatre’ in \textit{Disease, Diagnosis and Cure}, pp. 3-28 (7).
conclude that ‘the peturbations of the minde are often to blame for this and many other diseases’:

For seeing we are not maisters of our owne affections, wee are like battered Citties without walles, or shippes tossed in the Sea, exposed to all maner of assaults and daungers, even to overthrow our owne bodies …We haue infinite examples … of such as haue dyed upon … such like perturbations of the mind: and of others that upon the same causes haue fallen into grievous diseases: as … the Falling sickenesse, Apoplexies, Madnesse, Swounding, Palsies, and diverse such like infirmities upon the like causes.  

Once again we are reminded of the importance of boundaries: of ‘bodies’ that can be ‘overthrow[n]’ by dangerous assaults of invading enemies. Nicholas Breton’s political message at the outset of this chapter—which emphasized unity over division through metaphors of a city that could be endangered by the slightest breach—here accrues medical resonance. Likening the sick body to a ‘battered cit[y] without walls’, Jorden maps Breton’s obscure geographies onto the medicalised body; an ‘unkind breach’ (Oth., IV.i.213) in the body or mind could, by these accounts, render the body susceptible to sickness, to ‘peturbations of the mind’, to ‘falling sickness’ and ‘diverse such like infirmities’. In this way, we see clearly the dangers of allowing the self to be breached, of opening the self up to others, in the terms that the loving subjects of the previous chapter demanded. Unity is safe, and from Cassio’s ‘infirmities’ to Othello’s ‘Falling sickenesse’, Shakespeare demonstrates in medical terms how dangerous division can be.

Finding himself at a strange intersection between the natural and the numinous, between real and performed trances, Jorden is pushed to the limits of his medical knowledge, driven by the compulsion to locate a diagnosis for what was considered as being beyond the interpretive capacity of physicians and theologians alike. This was the substantial interpretive crux that occupied Casaubon and, like Jorden, he sought to dislocate these tranced states—including Melancholici, maniaci, ecstatis, phrenetici, epileptic

120 Edward Jorden, sigs. E4r; G2v-G3r. See also Peterson, Popular Medicine, Hysterical Disease, and Social Controversy in Shakespeare’s England (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), esp. pp. 165-71.
within his catalogue—from their religious roots; instead he moves to explore them as diseases brought about by a ‘concurrence of Naturall Causes’, something that he assures his readers ‘is granted by all Physicians and Naturalists … Nobody doubts that’.121 ‘Endeavour[ing] to reduce divers ecstaties to naturall causes’, Casaubon quickly establishes the state as being ‘sometimes taken for a bodily disease’, proceeding from natural causes and curable by natural remedy.122 The thrust of Casaubon’s Treatise is his belief that Enthusiasme and (false) claims to divine inspiration could be explained ‘upon some grounds of nature’, and that what were taken by some for revelations and manifestations of the Holy Spirit were in fact symptoms of Melancholy.123 ‘In this respect’, notes Michael Heyd, Casaubon ‘continued to develop a traditional line in Anglican thought which went back to the turn of the century’, one which ‘was clearly expressed … in Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy’.124 Like Burton, ‘possibly under his influence’, Casaubon calls upon an array of traditional medical sources in making his point.125 In his chapter, ‘On Contemplative and Philosophicall Enthusiasme’, we are introduced to a number of ‘particular examples’ of ecstatic and epileptic sufferers, the first being a woman, in a case mentioned by Terullian (c.160-220 AD) who ‘in ecstasies of the spirit happen unto her at Church’ claimed ‘(in her fits) [to] converse with Angels: sometimes with the Lord himselfe’.126 Yet ‘[s]uch an ecstatical woman’, he concludes, was less divinely inspired than she ‘was much troubled with melancholy’.127 Similar revelations follow for

121 Casaubon, p. 36.
122 Ibid., p. 80; 52.
123 Ibid., p. 4.
124 Michael Heyd, ‘Be Sober and Reasonable’: The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries (Leiden: Brill, 1995), p. 76. This ‘traditional line’ was one that would also be picked up by Henry More’s Enthusiasmus Triumphatus, the following year, and be continued by contributions including George Hickes in a sermon on enthusiasm (1680; reprinted three times), Locke’s Essay Concerning Human Understanding, and Swift’s A Tale of the Tub (1704) and The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit (1710), an attack upon mechanical enthusiasm at which Casaubon only hinted but never accomplished.
125 Heyd, p. 76.
126 Casaubon, p. 88.
127 Casaubon, p. 89; 93.
his subsequent subjects: ‘so many we take into the number of ecstaticall men’. Whether or not ecstasies were authentic was therefore difficult to gauge; in this climate a false prophet such as Joan of Arc may be taken for the real thing—‘the spirit of deep prophecy she hath | Exceeding the nine Sibyls of old Rome’ (Henry IV, I.i.29-30)—while the ‘raptures’ and accurate foresight of sibylline figures such as Cassandra will be diagnosed as ‘mad’ and ‘brain-sick’ (II.ii.122).

Moving to consider more recent cases, Casaubon’s next study is of a baker’s son in Oldenburgh in 1581 who, beaten with ‘fists’, subsequently suffered ‘diverse terrible fits’ of ‘Epilepsie’ from which, rather than recovering from, he later ‘fell into ecstasies … without either sense or motion’. Another contemporary case, this time of a Maid in Fribourg in 1560, brings him to the similar conclusion that their ‘ecstasies were epilepticall fits’. All these examples, ancient and contemporary, served to demonstrate that these mystical experiences, trances and ecstasies were pathological symptoms:

Truly I do not see any cause to believe that in any of these many Visions or Ecstasies, there was anything at all supernaturall, either divine or diabolicall, more then is in every common disease.

And subscribing to this naturalistic understanding of ecstasy, Casaubon would briefly consider how it might function as any other disease:

I will not make question of it … but I desire only to propose it, that learned Naturalists and Physicians may (if they please) consider it; whether it be probable or possible, that naturall Ecstasies and Enthusiasms … should be contagious: though not contagious in the same manner as the Plague, or the Pox is; yet contagious in their kind.

This is precisely the proposition that would come to occupy the next generation of critics

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128 Ibid., p. 88.
129 See also Jessica L. Malay, Prophecy and Sibyline Imagery in the Renaissance: Shakespeare’s Sibyls (London: Routledge, 2010).
130 Ibid., p. 93; 94.
131 Ibid., p. 96.
132 Ibid., p. 124.
133 Ibid., p. 134.
of enthusiasm, which was understood as being what Daniel Lindmark terms ‘the preaching disease’ in his discussion of contagious ecstasy in eighteenth-century Sweden. Here he quotes Olof Celsius, president of the Stockholm Consistory, writing of what was by 1776 not merely a proposition, but an established diagnosis:

The consequences of this enthusiasm may be less dangerous as long as the infection is restricted to certain individuals. But since it has really proved to be contagious, just like certain diseases, it is believed that entire crowds of people may be easily infected in the meanwhile, damaging the country and agitating the congregation.

A century on from Casaubon’s proposition, conceptions of ecstatic phenomena continue to situate themselves between medical and theological thought. Here we find answers to Casaubon’s question as to whether ecstasy might be in some sense contagious, most notably in works such as French physician Philippe Hecquet’s pamphlet on those suffering les maladies de l’épidémie convulsionnaire (1733), a work which considers convulsions as not brought about by divine or demonic intervention, but rather understands them as psychological phenomenon born of an agitated imagination: ‘an actual soul fever’, to borrow a phrase from German Philosopher Christoph Martin Wieland. What was for Casaubon merely a passing thought, therefore, would be explored in full a century later as debates surrounding the ecstatic condition continued.

These debates also, however, as I have been suggesting, precede Casaubon’s study: just as these lines of enquiry were carried forward, these questions about the nature of these altered states were ones which he inherited from an array of early modern writers. Indeed, Casaubon’s consideration that ecstasies could be ‘contagious in their kind’ would by no means have been alien to an early modern audience. We saw in Chapter One how

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135 Cit. Lindmark, p. 139.
early modern writers, informed by Longinus’ theories about the sublime impact of words upon the body, considered the potential for one ecstasy to beget another. In his treatise on poetry, for instance, Henry Dethick (1547/8 - c.1613) celebrates poets who could experience ‘a burning ardour of mind, as if in a kind of violent impulse’, and could bring about a similar experience for their listeners.\(^\text{137}\) In *An Apology of Poetry*, Philip Sidney likewise observes the intense ‘heart-ravishing’ potential of poetry which could ‘strike, pierce’ and ‘possess’ the soul.\(^\text{138}\) Poetry could carry hearers away from themselves: the ecstasy of a poet could bring about ecstasies in its audience members. Elsewhere, in *Hamlet*—a play that repeatedly identifies the ear as a location of danger, as a vulnerable entry way into the body and mind—Ophelia’s ‘speech’ is reported as having the potential to ‘move | The hearers to collection’ (IV.v.8-9), and Hamlet’s ‘words’ strike Gertrude ‘like daggers’. In these models, subject and soul could all too easily be moved by words that entered the ear.

We might, therefore, situate Casaubon’s suggestion alongside the early modern medical discussions heard above, where epilepsy was understood as emanating from harmful vapours. This is precisely what underpins Casca’s fears that that which brought about Caesar’s fit might also pose a threat to him:

> And still as [Caesar] refused it the rabblement hooted, and clapped their chopped hands, and threw up their sweaty nightcaps, and uttered such a deal of stinking breath because Caesar refused the crown that it had almost choked Caesar, for he swooned and fell down at it. And for mine own part, I durst not laugh, for fear of opening my lips and receiving bad air.

(*JC.*, I.ii. 242-8)

Fearing the ‘infection of air’ as capable of bringing about ‘most contagious diseases, as the falling sickness’, Casca reflects an anxiety in the early modern period concerning the


contagious nature of epilepsy. Pinpointing ‘stinking breath’ as the cause of Caesar’s falling sickness, Casca insists upon the ‘geohumoral quality’ of this altered state, aligning it with ‘filthy utterances’, as Hobgood observes. What, in early modern medical treatises, are considered ‘noxious vapours’ are here represented as ‘bad air[s]’; airs which to receive have the same violent effect on the body.

CASSIUS But soft, I pray you; what, did Caesar swoon?
CASCA He fell down in the market-place, and foamed at mouth, and was speechless.
BRUTUS ‘Tis very like; he hath the falling sickness.

(Footnotes:
140 Hobgood, np.
142 Hobgood, np.
143 Donne, Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, p. 77. On the relationship between body, passions, and environment, see esp. Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr (eds.), Environment and...
observe the dramatic potential of Casaubon’s claim. As Longaville tells us from across
the canon, ‘vows are but breath, and breath a vapour is’, thus implicating the dangers of
Othello and Iago’s ‘vapour-vow[s]’ (LLL, IV.iii.63; 65):

OTHELLO     Now, by yon marble heaven,
            In the due reverence of a sacred vow,
            I here engage my words.

IAGO       Do not rise yet.

            Iago kneels
            Witness, you ever-burning lights above,
            You elements that clip us round about,
            Witness that Iago doth give up
            The execution of his wit, hands, and heart,
            To wronged Othello’s service. Let him command,
            And to obey shall be in me remorse,
            What bloody business ever.

            (III.iii.454-64)

In a play that makes the power of words all too clear—where ‘hearts are piercèd through
the ear’ (I.iii.204) and the art of telling stories is deemed no less powerful than witchcraft
(I.iii.129-70)—we cannot fail to recognise the dangerous potential that lies within these
exchanges. Binding themselves together in what a number of critics have identified as per
verba presenti vows, this engagement of words follows a scene that brings into focus the
material consequences of the imagination.144 ‘I have a pain upon my forehead here’ (282):
though Othello’s pain here is principally taken to signify his cuckoldom as horns push
through his skull, we can all too easily comprehend that Othello here experiences
something akin to Gonzalo’s pain in The Tempest, as Stephano and Trinculo ‘cram …
words [into] his ears against | The stomach of [his] sense’ (II.i.107-8).

The hearing process, as explained by Helkiah Crooke, is one of violent invasion,
whereby ‘sound sealeth or stampeth in the ayre the species or forme of the sound, and

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… driueth it on vnto the instrument of hearing which … receiue[s] those species, and must like-wise be mooued'.

145 ‘My Lord, I see you’re moved’ (Oth., III.iii.228): taking the early modern anatomist’s conception of the mouth and ear as connected in a circulatory system, whereby ‘inward air’ is continually replaced and refreshed, Iago’s interruptions throughout Act III, Scene iii can be understood as preventing Othello from expelling the poisoned aire which, ‘implanted in the instrument of hearing’, is trapped inside his body.

146 A common feature of early modern plague literature, the process of purgation is delayed in Othello:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IAGO</th>
<th>I know not that; but such a handkerchief—</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am sure it was your wife’s—did I today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>See Cassio wipe his beard with.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHELLO</td>
<td>If it be that—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAGO</td>
<td>If it be that, or any, it was hers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It speaks against her with the other proofs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(437-42)

These are, to appropriate from Joseph du Chesne’s *Practise of Chymicall and Hermetical Physicke* (1605), but ‘fumes and smoakie evaporations proceeding from burnt or scorched blood’, ‘fuming matter’ that is ‘lifted up and carried into the braine, and therin set an fire, stir[ing] up Meteors, long madnesses, burning phrenzies … paines of head, [and] falling sicknesses’. If, as Allison K. Deutermann observes, ‘it is by stopping the mouth of this dazzling storyteller and, at the same time, stuffing his ears with poison that Iago works upon him’, then Moss’s earlier suggestion that Othello’s fit represents ‘the pinnacle of Iago’s manipulations, the “medicine” that contaminates both the body and the spirit of the Moor’, finds medical support in Thomas Blount’s *Glossographia* (1656):

*Epilepsie (epilepsia)* the Falling-sickness … is caused by some humor or vapour; suddenly stopping the passage of spirits in the brain, which the brain striving to

145 Crooke, sig. Fff6r.
expel, causeth [t]he Patient to fall down, and commonly foam at the mouth.  

Understood this way, Othello’s ecstatic epilepsy is brought about, in Francis Bacon’s terms, by the ‘Grossenesse of [Iago’s] Vapours, which rise and enter [through the ear and] into the Cells of [his] Braine’. Indeed, Casaubon himself notes that to be enthusiastic is to be ‘replenished with wind’, to be under the influence (or inflowance) of the airs and spirits that surround us. Othello thus exhibits the dramatic potential of Casaubon’s proposition that ecstasy, like enthusiasm and epilepsy, might be in some sense transmissible. In considering the ‘extent to which [Iago] works to replicate his own self-division in Othello’, this chapter has demonstrated how such self-fracture could be read in the light of period medical discourses surrounding the ecstatic experience. If ecstasy could be transmissible, I have suggested—if ‘a burning ardour in the mind’ of the poet could have ‘a kind of violent impulse’ on audience members, if words could violently ‘move’ their hearers—this medical reading demonstrates how Iago’s ‘dangerous conceits’, which ‘burn like mines of sulphur’, bring about Othello’s ‘violent induction into this new discourse of interiority’.  

Shakespeare employs this trance state to enhance the dramatization of a violent moment of self-fracture, an intensely physiological instance of the radical fracturing experienced by the subjects who suffer ecstasy in Othello. Where Iago is able to inhabit an ecstatic model of being—‘I am not what I am’—and control the extent to which he is received by others as ‘brave Iago, honest and just’ (V.i.31), Othello is unable to recuperate from being thrown beside himself, and consequently loses all sense of self-address. In bidding ‘farewell [to] content’, as we heard above, Othello is given over to ecstasy, but

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150 Casaubon, p. 15.  
151 Neill, p. 159.
unlike Iago he cannot master the art of losing control. Instead, from the moment of Othello's physical collapse, we see a subject not successfully negotiating a state of sustained dislocation, but a subject that is fractured beyond repair: he 'whom our full Senante [can no longer] call all in all sufficient' (IV.256-7), he that was Othello. Once sent out to his beloved, Othello now finds himself without destination, without a loving interlocutor, and it 'shakes [him] thus'. ‘Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content’ (III.iii.350): Othello here displays an awareness of his self-fracturing, and finds himself discontentedly displaced from himself.

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Thrown beside himself, Othello’s moment of ecstatic and epileptic rupture is at a far remove from the ecstasies enjoyed by the subjects elsewhere in this study, and indeed the ecstasy of romantic union of Act II, Scene i, as discussed by Kirsch. But neither moment constitutes, in Kirsch’s terms, the ‘most ecstatic moment in the play’. Indeed, a challenge to this kind of claim—and the implication that ecstasy has a singular, stable meaning, designating a particular emotion, measurable in a specific way—has run, implicitly, throughout this examination of ecstasy. The play is, as this chapter has suggested, deeply wrought with subjects who exhibit the self-shattering potential of what Butler famously terms ‘precarious life’: subjects who know what it means to suffer ecstasy. Iago’s victims function as dangerous exemplars of what it means to live interpersonally, to take a step outside and beyond oneself, but it is not until the play’s closing stages that we see this exhibited most forcefully. For, while an examination of the dangers of ecstasy has repeatedly drawn us to moments of violent self-fracture, we find its apotheosis not in a literal moment of ecstasy, but in Othello’s final speech:
Soft you, a word or two before you go.
I have done the state some service, and they know’t;
No more of that. I pray you in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice: then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinable gum. Set you down this;
And say besides that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
I took by th’ throat the circumcised dog
And smote him - thus.

*He stabs himself.*

(V.ii.336-54)

‘Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate’: drawn into Iago’s world of plural and diffuse identity, Othello now acknowledges himself as both instrument of and servant to the Venetian state, and as the Turk, ‘the circumcised dog’, despised and feared throughout Venice. Succinctly, he here acknowledges the paradox of one being two. The ‘heavy interim’ between ‘him - thus’—where punctuation punctuates gesture—is one that draws together both language and action, but also self and self. Such an interim has been crucial to this study’s consideration of ecstasy, from ecstatic subjects who sought to collapse the distance between themselves and the divine through prayer and meditation, to the merging of bodies in the lover’s kiss or sexual encounter. Indeed, Othello’s suicide here neatly echoes Juliet’s identical gesture in the previous chapter: one that would bring about a final ecstasy with Romeo. ‘Thus’ Othello similarly brings his fractured selves into violent contact and, in so doing, allows one half to recuperate for the failings of the other: a ‘single violet transplant’ (Donne, ‘The Extasie’, 37) of redemptive union. This is the tragedy of divided identity that Robert N. Watson observes as being implicit in both
Othello’s name—‘decipherable as ‘Ottoman’ with an Italian suffix’—and at the overarching level of the play’s title which presents both *Othello* and *The Moor of Venice*.  

In this self-suicidal gesture, Othello collapses the gap between the turbaned Turk and the Venetian and, as Janet Adelman writes, ‘returns via suicide to a purely martial mode’. Here Othello (or rather ‘he that was’) seeks to fix the ruptured verb ‘to be’ and distil himself back to singularity, back to distinction: ‘speak of me as I am’. For this is an ‘I am’ that cannot be inverted or displaced by Iago, who now retreats into silence and ‘never will speak word’ (302). To re-appropriate Adelman, then, Othello here returns via suicide to a mode of purity and singularity, to a coherence of subjectivity, to ‘grace in all simplicity’ (*PhT*, 54). Only in throwing himself beside himself can the Moor recover and restore himself: self-control only through self-loss. To recall Michel Serres’ claim, heard in the early stages of this thesis, ‘no one who has not experienced ecstasy can know what being together means’.  

Trembling on the verge of subjective fracture, the subjects of this chapter know what it means to suffer ecstasy. For the subject in sufferance is, as Jean-Luc Nancy would have it, always to some extent ecstatically beside itself: “I am suffering”, Nancy writes, ‘implies that there are two “I”s, each one foreign to the other (yet touching) … in “I am suffering”, one “I” rejects the other “I”’. As we have seen, identity and sense of self can be located precisely at this point of painful rejection and self-fracture. In “I am in ecstasy”, Nancy continues, ‘one I exceeds the other’, goes beyond, is thrown beside itself, and in so doing is forced not to see itself as equal to itself, but rather to locate itself via...

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152 Robert N. Watson, ‘Shakespeare’s New Words’, *SS*, 65 (2012), 358-77 (372). Watson here cites David Schalkwyk’s observation in *Speech and Performance in Shakespeare’s Sonnets and Plays*, that Othello’s name was created ‘supposedly by adding to the first syllable of “Ot-ho-man” the Italiante “-ello”’, n. 64.  
displacement. Othello, I have suggested, is a play that similarly establishes a model of identity that resides elsewhere. The first step in Iago’s induction to contemporary consciousness is to bring subjects to the realisation that they are not themselves, that the self is not a stable, fixed entity. As Nancy articulates:

The soul differs from itself with a trembling—nothing more than a shuddering and a pulsation, which makes it swoon and offers its identity in the collapse. Trembling differentiates, defers, identity: that is how identity is given. Identity, this chapter has suggested, resides not in the ‘simple adequation (I=I)’, nor in the statement ‘I am’. Instead, identity is formed by a sense of self that resides beyond the self. The experience of being inducted into this plural, flexible model, as Nancy implies, necessarily brings about a trembling, perhaps a temporary swoon or a moment of collapse. Indeed, the ecstatic tremble that has punctuated accounts of ecstasy throughout this study often occurs at the moment when ecstasy brings the subject into a threshold space between disparate selves. The challenge of a realisation such as ‘I am not what I am’, an experience of self-abjection which the ecstatic subjects of this study variously share, is that it requires the subject to recognise that identity is constituted somewhere in-the-between: be it the space between pronouns, or the interim between subject and divine or beloved in which relation occurs. While the fracture of ecstasy might, in Serres’ terms, help the subject realise what it means to be together, it also highlights the extent to which such togetherness is not permanent. As Judith Butler had it: ‘we’re undone by each other. And if we’re not, we’re missing something … One does not always stay intact’. With autonomy comes abjection, and vice versa. The ecstatic tremble denotes a subject that will be thrown from itself again. And necessarily so, for, as Nancy identifies, ‘that is how identity is given’. Ecstasy may only be a temporary experience or a fleeting encounter,

156 Ibid.
but to observe a model of a self that can fracture and be fractured, depart and return, that can recognise that its relationships and experiences render it simultaneously ‘simple’ and ‘compounded’ (P%T, 46), might just suggest the extent to which Renaissance selfhood is inherently ecstatic.
CONCLUSION

‘We are never in ourselves, but beyond’

In his essay ‘On practice’, Montaigne describes an encounter with death. Having ‘fortuned one day, for recreation-sake, to goe forth and take the ayre’, he had an accident on the journey home that would leave him on the brink of death:

The nagge lay along astonied in one place, and I in a trance groveling on the ground ten or twelve paces wide of him; my face all torne and brused, my sword which I had in my hand a good way from me, my girdle broken, with no more motion or sense in me then a stocke. It is the onely swowning that ever I felt yet. Those that were with me, after thy had assayed all possible meanes to bring me to my selfe againe, supposing me dead, tooke me in their armes, and with much adoe were carying me home to my-house, which was about halfe a french league thence.\(^1\)

Thrown from his horse, Montaigne suffers a little death: a ‘trance’—‘the onely swowning’ he had ‘ever … felt yet’—from which, seemingly, he could not be revived. ‘After I had for two houres space, by all, bin supposed dead and past all recoverie’, Montaigne continues, ‘I began to stir and breathe’.\(^2\) As he slowly comes to, ‘little by little’ Montaigne becomes aware of the accident’s effect on his body—he gets to his feet and vomits the ‘great aboundance of blood [that] was falne i_nto my stomacke’—but even more so, he begins to appreciate the encounter’s effect on his soul:

Me thought, my selfe had no other hold of me, but of my lippes-ends. I closed mine eyes, to helpe (as me seemed) to send it forth, and tooke a kind of pleasure to linger and languishingly to let my selfe goe from my selfe. It was an imagination swimming superficially in my minde, as weake and as tender as all the rest: but in truth, not onely exempted from displeasure, but rather commixt with that pleasant sweetenesse, which they feelle that suffer themselves to fall into a soft-slumbring and sense-entrancing sleepe.\(^3\)

Montaigne’s self, Montaigne’s life, here resides on the tip of his lips: at the threshold of

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\(^1\) Montaigne, *Essays*, II.6.205
\(^3\) Montaigne, II.6.206-7.
the body, suspended on the brink of departure. Lingering and languishing there, Montaigne willingly sends himself ‘forth’, and finds ‘a kind of pleasure’, a ‘pleasant sweetnesse’ in the experience of letting ‘my selfe go from my selfe’. Thrown from himself, Montaigne enjoys the ecstasy of this temporary departure.

I turn to Montaigne here, in part, because his experience seems to me a celebration of what could otherwise be thought of as a particularly painful moment of ecstasy, but also because his articulation of being beside himself resonates with the experiences of many subjects as seen throughout this study. As with discussions of sublime ecstasy in Chapter One, Montaigne recalls how this experience was like ‘a flashing or lightening, that smote my soule with shaking, and that I came from another world’.4 Like Hamlet, he feels himself ‘yeelding up the ghost’, and like Erasmus, Demetrius, and Bottom, he articulates the experience of his soul ‘as in a cloud …’:

They came not from my self. All which notwithstanding, I knew neither whence I came, nor whither I went, nor could I understand or consider what was spoken unto me. … Whateuer the soule did assist … was but a dream, being lightly touched, and often sprinkled by the soft impressions of the senses.5

Like Venus, Montaigne asserts his life and self as hanging by the tip of his lips; like Juliet, he finds how deathly ecstasy can be. ‘To say truth’, he asserts, ‘it had beene a very happy death’. Montaigne—whose Essays elsewhere reveal his attempts at self-control, his desire to keep himself in the saddle—here concedes that being beside oneself, while having the potential to be a dangerous and painful experience, could also be pleasurable. Furthermore, as the remainder of his essay goes on to suggest, such temporary loss of self catalyses a desire for further discovery and knowledge of self. As Felicity Green has observed, this ecstatic experience begins Montaigne’s ‘study of the soul’, and it is in recalling this moment that Montaigne is prompted to digress into the study of himself:

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4 Montaigne, Essays, II.6.209.
5 Ibid., II.6.208.
‘Many yeares are past since I have no other aime, whereto my thoughts bend, but my selfe, and that I controule and study nothing but my selfe’. Montaigne, who, as Ann Hartle has considered, ‘always comes upon himself by accident’, here reveals the experience of being thrown from himself, of temporarily losing himself, to have motivated him to find himself, and to understand more fully what the self is.

By bringing together discussions of ecstasy by theologians, philosophers, physicians, dramatists, and poets, this thesis has brought to light the extent to which this altered state held a curious fascination for a range of early modern writers. A key aim of this thesis has been to reveal the complex, multivalent nature of ‘ecstasy’; each chapter in turn has shown how the word denoted a range of different experiences—from drunken revelry, to religious rapture, sexual encounter, or medical seizure—and how this state could be experienced in a variety of ways: spatially, temporally, physically, and psychologically. I have also shown through a number of close readings how experiences and representations of ecstasy are often symptomatic of broader issues at play: from the force dynamics in dramas such as Hamlet and A Midsummer Night’s Dream, to the pacing of desire in Venus and Adonis and Romeo and Juliet, to experiences of fracture and displacement in Othello. Although I have focused on these texts, I have also, where appropriate, drawn on passages from other works in order to demonstrate how Shakespeare and his contemporaries present a sense of interiority which renounces any essentialist claim to coherence, and instead come to an appreciation of the productively flexible and precarious nature of selfhood.

As shown in Chapter One, early modern conceptions of ecstasy as both a painful and pleasurable experience were informed by classical thought, which understood

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6 Felicity Green, ‘Montaigne’s Soul’, in Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture, ed. Brian Cummings (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 95-112 (95).
ecstasy as both an opportunity for interaction and union with the divine or beloved, while also holding the potential for violent subjective fracture. This chapter provided context as to why ‘ecstasy’ might often be glossed as ‘madness’ or ‘frenzy’, as well as introducing a range of other words and states that belong to the ‘ecstatic’ lexicon, such as abjection, distraction, enthusiasm, inspiration, transformation, trance, and rapture. The second chapter of this study moved from classical texts to the early modern period, and explored in detail the dominant narratives of religious ecstasy inherited by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. In so doing, it demonstrated how the ecstatic experience was frequently articulated in terms of movement, ascension, and journeying, and demonstrated how ecstasy could be read as a spatial experience. Furthermore, it explored the ways in which commonplace narratives of religious ecstasy—which emphasize the experience of journeying out of oneself in order to return home to and unite with a divine other—provided writers such as Shakespeare and Donne with a metaphorical framework through which to explore the experience of being ‘beside oneself’ as a literal journey, a moment of temporary transformation, or an experience of intersubjective union. While Shakespeare might not engage directly with theologically inflected narratives of ecstasy, this chapter posited that his works provide secular versions of these ecstatic models.

Having established Shakespeare’s interest in the ecstatic experience to be at one remove from these divine contexts, Chapters Three and Four explored other kinds of ecstatic experiences in Shakespeare’s works. In addition to the spiritual and geographic readings of ecstasy offered in the preceding chapters, Chapter Three demonstrated the extent to which ecstasy maps on to discourses of the body, especially in moments of amorous and erotic encounter. In light of Hamlet’s critically overlooked connection between ecstasy, time, and pulse-rate, this chapter brought to light the intersections between ecstasy and (little) death in period medical, philosophical, dramatic, and poetic
texts. In so doing, it explored the ecstatic experience as a moment of radical temporal suspension. Returning to the etymological sense of ‘ecstasy’ as the action of standing or being placed outside, Chapter Four explored the ecstatic experience as one of displacement and dislocation. Identifying that ‘trance’ carries senses of both emotional disposition and spatial dis-position—of suffering mental affliction and of finding oneself out of place—this chapter considered the experience of ‘suffering ecstasy’ as a consequence of such radical dislocation: of tranced subjects who experience the fracture of displacement. Having established in previous chapters the ecstatic dynamic of one self in two bodies, this final chapter inverted that model in order to consider how the experience of ecstatic displacement—a loss of place that manifested itself in a series of tranced moments, from Iago’s distracted plurality, to Cassio’s drunken fracture, to Othello’s violent medical seizure—could fashion a subject that embodies fractured, multiple selves.

A further aim of this thesis has been to identify a lens through which to explore Renaissance conceptions of selfhood, and to offer a conception of ecstatic subjectivity. From the outset, this thesis established itself not as a study of the self-avowedly autonomous individual, but rather as a study of the dividual, and the experience of divisibility. At the very beginning of this thesis, Cressida announced herself as having both ‘a kind of self that resides with [Troilus]’ and ‘an unkind self that itself will leave | To be another’s fool’. This claim, one of self-departure, self-fracture, and self-alienation, has echoed throughout this study, having been heard variously in claims such as ‘I have lost myself; I am not here’ *Rom.,* I.i.197 or ‘I will go lose myself’ *Err.,* I.ii.29; from ‘am I not Hermia?’ *MND*, III.ii.273 to ‘I am not what I am’ *TN*, III.i.132; *Oth.,* I.65. Each chapter has considered the dangers of ecstatic existence, but so too has it shown the rewards. To consider moments of ecstasis as this study has done, is to recognise that the
ecstatic subject enjoys a ‘kind of self’ that is constituted not by the moment of arrival, but by the experience of projection: a self that is not fixed but is still coming into being, and which readily anticipates of the next act of departure. As Walter Pater writes emotively in the final stages of *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*:

> Not the fruit of experience, but experience itself, is the end. ... To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life. ... While all melts under our feet, we may as well grasp at any exquisite passion, or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free for a moment.  

To be ecstatic, Pater suggests in his characteristically celebratory mode, is to be ‘renewed from moment to moment’, and to enjoy the ‘strange, perpetual, weaving and unweaving of ourselves’.

> ‘I have a kind of self that resides with you, and an unkind self, that itself will leave’: if, as Linda Charnes has described, this is Cressida’s ‘notorious identity’—an assertion that is characteristic of a subject caught in a pre-established narrative—I have emphasized that this is also her ecstatic identity, her dividuality.  

While there is anguish and anxiety in this recognition of divided selfhood—such that will later bring about similar distress in Troilus’ realisation that ‘this is and is not Cressid’ (V.i.53)—this thesis has suggested the virtues of such ecstatic existence. What Cressida highlights, acknowledging that she is in part constituted by her capacity to reside beyond, outside, away from home, is a notion that many of the subjects herein have discovered: that selfhood is not neatly defined or established by a quest for autonomy or the experience of abjection, but by the recognition that the self is constituted by both, and that ipseity resides somewhere in the in-between. In so much as ecstasy enables the subject to make

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the claim that ‘I have a kind of self that resides with you’—to acknowledge, in other words, that the self might be formed in the interim between and the mingling of self and other—it discourages the subject from considering that model of selfhood as the final destination. To experience ecstasy is not simply to be thrown beside oneself, but is to find that the self was to some degree beside itself already, and that subjectivity will always reside both at and within this threshold.

We are [as Montaigne has it] never in ourselves, but beyond.11

11 Montaigne, I.3.5.
In an article published in the *New Scientist* in 2014, Anil Anathaswamy considers the overlap between epilepsy and ecstasy from a modern medical perspective. Asking ‘Why do bliss and ecstasy sometimes accompany ecstatic seizures?’, Anathaswamy explores the ‘feelings of bliss’ experienced by epileptic sufferers, and furthermore if and how such ‘ecstatic epilepsy’ could ‘open a window on self-awareness more generally’.

Elsewhere, in her study of ‘Ecstatic Epileptic Seizures’, Fabienne Picard, a neurologist at the University Hospital in Geneva, Switzerland, posits that the reason patients may not talk about their experiences may be ‘because the emotions are so strong and strange, maybe they feel embarrassed to speak about them; maybe they think the doctor will find them mad’. Ecstasy, even now, retains these associations with madness. But by encouraging her patients to speak about their ecstatic seizures, Picard observed that their sensations ‘could be characterized by three broad categories of feelings’: heightened self-awareness, a sense of physical wellbeing, and finally, intense positive emotions. The questions I have asked here regarding the interrelation between these altered states of consciousness, and their impact on a subject’s sense of self, are therefore questions that continue to be explored in modern medical study.

Informed by the intersections between these issues, I proposed that the ‘Oxford-Globe forum’ (December 2017)—a bi-annual event that brings together researchers and practitioners in medicine, theatre, and academia to explore a designated topic—take as its theme ‘Altered States’. Papers were invited on (but not limited to) a wide range of

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topics—consciousness and unconsciousness, hallucinations, possession, sleep and dreaming, melancholy and anxiety, madness, anger, passion and passions, trances, voices, echoes, the senses, obsession, contagion, grief and mourning—with an aim to enabling a discussion among different interests and disciplines. As well as academics from a number of (primarily UK based) universities, speakers included members of the NHS, and from the World Health Organisation. Of particular relevance here is a paper by Christopher Bailey (of the World Health Organisation), which spoke in many ways to Anathaswamy’s article, and to Picard’s study. Discussing his own experiences of epilepsy, Bailey articulated how this altered state of consciousness, for him, had also altered his sense of self: he described how, in moments of seizure, he felt divided from himself, and felt his sense of self transforming. Recent research into the neurology of seizures, he suggested, located the effects of epilepsy on the brain, and identified that the location that was affected was also the site that was associated with one’s sense of self. As Picard observes in her study, the neurological origin of ‘ecstatic epilepsy’ pointed her towards the insula—a region of the cortex that is of growing interest to scientists studying consciousness. As Anathanaswamy observes:

The portion of the insula closest to the back of the head deals with objective properties, such as body temperature, and the front portion, or anterior insula, produces subjective feelings of body states and emotions, both good and bad. In other words, the anterior insula is responsible for how we feel about our body and ourselves, helping to create a conscious feeling of ‘being’.

The suggestion in Chapter Four of this study of a link between ecstasy, epilepsy, and sense of self, therefore, has a resonance with these modern experiences of ‘ecstatic epilepsy’.

The aim of the forum was to consider how these modern experiences and

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4 Anathanaswamy, p. 46.
conceptions of ‘altered states’ might not be at a remove from those considered in this thesis and in early modern studies more broadly, but could be placed in productive dialogue with them. Situated in between these papers, therefore, was a workshop session, co-ordinated by me and James Wallace, which staged a number of the ‘altered states’ discussed in this thesis: Thaisa’s ‘entrancement’ and Pericles’ trance as he is reunited with Marina; the report of Caesar’s ‘falling sickness’; Othello’s seizure; and the feigned seizures in Volpone and The Devil is an Ass. We prefaced each scene with early modern medical accounts of these states, in particular the ‘falling sickness’ and accounts of prolonged trances, including extracts from Shakespeare’s son-in-law John Hall and his Select Observations (published posthumously in 1657), Edward Jorden’s Brief Discourse of the Suffocation of the Mother (1603), Helkiah Crooke’s Microcosmographia (1615), Pierre Charron on the ‘falling sickness’ (1608), and Meric Casaubon’s later consideration of an affinity between epilepsy and ecstasy (1654).

The response to the workshop highlighted key differences in the reception to the feigned seizures in Jonson’s Volpone and The Devil is an Ass (see Chapter Four), and Othello’s seizure. The former, as expected, were performed, and received, comically: the audience laughed at the extent to which the characters adopted common traits of these altered states to serve their own ends. For Othello’s fit, which was staged at the end of the session, we played the scene two ways: the first with a short trance, akin to a fainting spell; the second a more violent seizure or petite mal. Audience members noted that they felt more ‘moved’ by the second, and felt uncomfortable not only watching someone in a seizure and not assisting them, but furthermore watching someone watch someone else in a seizure, and not assisting them. In response to these issues, we again played the scene two ways, this time with a focus not only on Othello’s trance, but on Iago’s response to this seizure. The first time with Iago watching Othello for the
duration of the trance; the second time with Iago turning his back, and delivering his ‘work on, my medicine’ speech to the audience. These scenes provoked a number of comments and discussions, but one comment in particular stands out: an assertion from one of the doctors in attendance that the appropriate response when a patient has an epileptic seizure is not to interfere: to stand back and not touch them. Medical practitioners also observed that the dramatizations of the early modern states resonated with those they had seen in practice, where patients might not be able to remember how long they had been unconscious, or remember what they said or did in these altered states.

I discuss this forum here because, to me, it suggests that there is still much to be gained from a consideration of the intersections between various altered states of consciousness, and furthermore the intersection between the work of early modern scholars, and modern medical practitioners. Having taken ecstasy as its primary focus, this study hopes to open up further avenues of study surrounding altered states more broadly, and to invite further consideration about what they might tell us about our modern condition, and vice versa.
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