SHAKESPEARE'S *CUPIO DISSOLVI*:

DESIRE, DEATH AND RENEWAL

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis draws attention to the theme of destructive renewal in Shakespeare's plays and narrative poems. Scholarship to date has explored Shakespeare's destructive acts and frequently attributed them to a crisis of character: a result of shame, melancholy or hubris. Little attention has been given to the notion that these destructive, often self-destructive, acts are motivated by a desire to die. This thesis focuses on these moments of desiring death and reveals them to be expressions of faith, love, power and renewal. Many plays and other texts are discussed, but a particular focus is placed on three of Shakespeare's plays, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Timon Athens*, and his narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece.* In these works, I find persistent, if varied, manifestations of a sentiment found in St Paul's epistle to the Philippians, *'desiderium habens dissolvi, et esse cum Christo'* [I desire to dissolve, and be with Christ].[1] This Pauline sentiment, abbreviated to *cupio dissolvi* and invoked in sermons, religious treatises and emblem books in late medieval and early modern Europe, had become, by the late sixteenth century, a powerful expression of faith in the resurrection, and a belief in the soul's priority over the flesh.

I intend to follow the early modern users of *cupio dissolvi,* employing the sentiment as a shorthand for a desire for destructive renewal. In the first four chapters, the analysis remains tethered to its Christian inception, which is important to the context of early modern literature and allows a roving freedom to articulate a broader paradigm of desiring violent renewal. In some texts, such as *Hamlet*, the paradigmatic use of *cupio dissolvi* intersects with a strong allusion to the original Pauline desire; in others, such as *Romeo and Juliet,* the

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[1] *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, Phil. 1:23.

paradigm is stretched in its application to notions of a secular union in death; and in the final

chapter, which explores Shakespeare's epic poem *The Rape of Lucrece, cupio dissolvi* is used

alongside twentieth-century literary theory, ostensibly removed from its Christian origin.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

EEBO – Early English Books Online

OED – Oxford English Dictionary

KJV – King James Bible

GEN – Geneva Bible, 1599

SS – Shakespeare Survey

SQ – Shakespeare Quarterly

F – Shakespeare's First Folio, 1623

HS – Donne's Holy Sonnets

CONVENTIONS

Spellings – I have sought to retain historical texts' original spelling and punctuation unless doing so may lead to confusion.

Non-English words and phrases - Latin, Greek and French - are immediately followed with an English translation in square brackets unless the word exists within the English lexicon.

SOURCES AND TEXTS

Bible references are taken from the Geneva Bible, 1599 unless otherwise stated. For my exploration of *Hamlet, Timon of Athens, Romeo and Juliet* and *The Rape of Lucrece* I have used the Arden Shakespeare third series. When I discuss *Hamlet's* Q1 and F versions I use the Arden edition of these alternate texts. I do occasionally reference commentary by editors of other editions, which are refenced in the footnotes. EEBO texts are listed in the footnotes and with their URL in the bibliography.

INTRODUCTION

I. Shakespeare's Self-destructive Renewal

This thesis illuminates the presence of a paradigm of self-destructive renewal that operates within Shakespeare's plays and narrative poems. Shakespeare's suicides, and recklessly suicidal acts, provide the most explicit account of self-destruction, which is, therefore, where most of the thesis is focused. Three plays merit close attention: *Hamlet, Timon of Athens*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. These plays offer related yet differing accounts of both self-destruction and the notion of renewal: *Hamlet* offers a close parallel to *cupio dissolvi*, the organising principle of this thesis; *Timon of Athens* reveals an apocalyptic destructive renewal; through *Romeo and Juliet* I engage with mystical notions of self-abnegation. The final chapter, on Shakespeare's narrative poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*, demonstrates the literary scope of the paradigm and a method of reading it alongside more recent literary theory. Other texts, such as *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra* and the poem *The Phoenix and the Turtle* provide further accounts of a paradigm of destructive renewal and are discussed throughout this thesis. These works have not been selected for a chapter-length analysis for the following reasons: *Hamlet* offers a closer parallel than *King Lear* to my organising principle of *cupio dissolvi*; *Romeo and Juliet* offers a unique perspective of mystical self-destruction; *Antony and Cleopatra* may be analysed in a similar way to *The Rape of Lucrece*, through a Lacanian lens, but Antony self-destruction lacks the eloquence of Lucrece's suicide and *The Phoenix and the Turtle* is used to reinforce my observation of destructive renewal as a paradigm operating in Shakespeare, but it is too brief and simplistic to support a whole chapter.

My thesis posits that a paradigm of self-destructive renewal in Shakespeare emerges from the Christian milieu of sixteenth-century England, and specifically a sentiment expressed by St Paul in his epistle to the Philippians '*desiderium habens dissolvi, et esse cum Christo*' [I desire to dissolve, and be with Christ].[1] This Pauline sentiment, abbreviated to *cupio dissolvi,* was invoked in sermons, religious treatises, and emblem books in late medieval and early modern Europe. By the late sixteenth century, it had become a powerful articulation of faith in the resurrection and an expression of belief in the soul's priority over the flesh. This thesis reveals and expounds on the complex manifestations of this paradigm in Shakespeare's plays and narrative poems and offers an approach, in the final chapter, that reveals a shared concern between Pauline and modern, secular notions of self-destructive renewal in Shakespeare. By secular I mean frameworks of thinking that are independent of religious discourse. The early modern reality is that secular and religious discourses were contested sites in which writers and thinkers adopted some of the structures and power of the sacred in their application to the profane.

This thesis builds on a literary interest in observing Christian language, biblical allusion, and theological themes in Shakespeare's plays and poems. Roy Battenhouse's anthology of commentary on *Shakespeare's Christian Dimension* provides ninety-two studies, primarily drawn from the latter half of the twentieth century, which seek to reveal such parallels and associations as 'Othello as Judas', 'King Lear and the Corinthian Letters' and '*Antony and Cleopatra* and the Christian Quest'.[2] His book demonstrates a lively culture of reading religion in Shakespeare, but the publication of Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti's essay 'The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies' suggests that such studies

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[1] *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, Phil. 1:23.
[2] *Shakespeare's Christian Dimension: An Anthology of Commentary*, ed. by Roy Battenhouse (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

struggled for attention amongst the nascent scholarship of New Historicism and cultural

materialism in the final decades of the twentieth century. Jackson and Marotti observe:

> interpretation of religious material and contexts never really ceased in early modern
> literary study but rather that they had just been pushed somewhat to the side by most
> New Historicists and cultural materialists.[3]

The scholars who focused on religion in Shakespeare at this time were required to defend the

value of such readings in an academic environment wary of this approach. As Jackson and

Marotti put it:

> Shakespeare scholars are probably agnostic, atheistic, or religiously indifferent [...]
> resistant to criticism that mystifies real-world economic, political, and social relations
> [...] they find it hard to take a fresh look at the manifestations of the religious in the
> work of a dramatist whose openness to interpretation has facilitated modern secular
> understandings of his plays.[4]

Some scholars have complicated the subject of reading religion in Shakespeare by attempting

to infer Shakespeare's faith, or lack of it, from his text. Eric Mallin's book *Godless*

Shakespeare, for example, sets out to suggest that Shakespeare had 'a mind and spirit

uncontained by orthodoxy'; in other words, Christianity could not subdue his wit and

irreverence.[5] Mallin concedes that reading the religious in Shakespeare differs from

speculating on his faith; one need not believe in God to allude to Christianity's structures,

images, and language. But *Godless Shakespeare* articulates the final and perhaps most

explicit rejection of the various connections between Shakespeare and faith from which 'the

turn' was observed.

Jackson and Marotti's essay perhaps perpetuated and amplified 'the turn' that they

sought to describe, encouraging the work of scholars who shared an interest in this approach.

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[3] Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, 'The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies', *Criticism*, 46.1 (2004), p. 1.
[4] Ibid., p. 1.
[5] Eric Scott Mallin, *Godless Shakespeare* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 11.

In the decade that followed, numerous readings of religion in Shakespeare emerged.[6] While

Jackson and Marotti's efforts developed a more responsive environment for studies of

religion in Shakespeare, which this thesis enjoys, they also draw on scholarship that predates

the emergence and possible hostility of New Historicism, such as the contributions made by

Caroline Spurgeon in her book *Mysticism in English Literature*,[7] and in certain books and

essays by G. Wilson-Knight.[8] This thesis also belongs to the most recent scholarship on

religion in Shakespeare, the collected works of Hannibal Hamlin and Alison Shell, for

example, and studies that present Shakespeare's Christian dimension through a comparative

literary approach to the psychological, philosophical and theological positions of the time.[9]

Other, more contemporary scholarship that has been particularly instructive to the shaping of

the argument include Jonathan Hart's collected essays *Imagining Culture* and Brian

Cummings' book *Mortal Thoughts*, which has been valuable as a model of charting the

development of ideas, chiefly the chapter 'Freedom, Suicide and Selfhood'.[10] Drew Daniel's

book, *Joy of the Worm,* detaches suicide from self-killing, freeing the latter to address

objectives that reach beyond a psychological disorder to, amongst other things, a 'pleasure-

in-destruction'.[11] I pick up on this desire for self-destruction and, in places, a desire for death

that Daniel identifies. The desire that I initially focused on was a desire for death, and

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[6] It was from this critical context that Alison Shell's 2010 survey of Shakespeare and religion emerged and from the 2007 conventions of the Renaissance Society of America and the Shakespeare Association of America (in which Jackson chaired a seminar entitled 'Shakespeare Between Religion and Philosophy') that Jackson and Marotti compiled an anthology of the latest critical responses to the area of religion and Shakespeare.

[7] Caroline Spurgeon, *Mysticism in English literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[8] George Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy*, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2001); George Wilson Knight, *The Mutual Flame: On Shakespeare's 'Sonnets' and 'The Phoenix and the Turtle'*, Methuen Library Reprints, 2. ed., repr (London: Methuen, 1978).

[9] *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Religion*, ed. by Hannibal Hamlin, Cambridge Companions to Authors (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Hannibal Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare*, 1st ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion*, The Arden Critical Companions (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[10] Jonathan Locke Hart, *Imagining Culture: Essays in Early Modern History and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Brian Cummings, *Mortal Thoughts: Religion, Secularity, and Identity in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[11] Drew Daniel, *Joy of the Worm: Suicide and Pleasure in Early Modern English Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), p. 224.

perhaps this medieval trope reappears throughout Shakespeare's work as well as in this thesis, but the greater desire is that of renewal.

My methodological approach begins with understanding the source and early modern manifestations of St Paul's sentiment *cupio dissolvi.* I explore the context of its earliest recorded occurrence, which begins with Ulrich Pinder's late medieval use of the phrase, followed by Thomas More, both of which may suggest its Catholic heritage. I then look at *cupio dissolvi* in early modern emblem books, revealing the desire for dissolution within the context of the medieval trope of *The Dance of Death* and its presence in the hugely popular emblem books of the early modern period to suggest its cultural ubiquity and significance. I turn my attention to its use in metaphysical poetry and, finally, in the sermons of John Donne. It is a chapter-length foundation to the thesis, which provides the context and conditions by which the sentiment filtered into Shakespeare's work. The taxonomy of *cupio dissolvi* serves as an organising principle for subsequent chapters and equips them with several interpretative approaches. In *Hamlet*, the desire for self-destructive renewal is present throughout, and the parallel between the Pauline sentiment and Shakespeare is most explicit in Hamlet's famous apostrophe, 'O that this too too solid flesh would melt' (F, 1.2.127). Through the context and framework of *cupio*, I hope to reveal that Hamlet's urge is a Christian appeal for a worldly dissolution and resurrection, a dissolution of political tyranny and moral malaise, which informs a reading of the rest of the play. An exploration of *Timon of Athens* follows this chapter. Timon shares Hamlet's desire for a destructive renewal, but his version is informed by the apocalyptic narratives of the Old Testament - a desire for violent destruction, leading to the world's resurrection. The next chapter draws on the mystical aspects of *cupio dissolvi*, in which I read *Romeo and Juliet*'s 'death-marked love' as a pilgrimage towards a secularised union, imagined through a sacred *unio mystica* template. The final chapter, which explores *The Rape of Lucrece*, is an outlier in two important ways: first, it is the only poem that is

offered a chapter-length analysis; second, I adopt a Lacanian frame of analysis, reading a desire for death and resurrection against the most substantial and influential modern reiteration of the theme in the work of Lacan. This final chapter employs Lacan as a semiotician and philosopher, not a psychoanalyst. Lacan's theoretical framework is challenging, often ambiguous and multivalent, but it offers an engaging perspective on the theme of destructive renewal that allows us to understand how the individual is composed within the symbols and language of a particular society. Lacan also provides a method of interpreting notions of destructive renewal in Shakespeare that relates to but is separate from the organising principle of *cupio dissolvi*.

Before going on to explore the recorded use of *cupio dissolvi* in the early modern period, I will briefly introduce the development of beliefs and ideas related to self-destruction from their Classical inception into the early modern period. This will reveal the interconnectedness of these ideas and illustrate the separation and central importance of renewal as the ingredient of faith.

II. Classical Self-destructive (non) Renewal

The most vivid Classical account of death as freedom is found in Plato's *Phaedo,* which introduces the antecedent condition of the duality of body and soul and richly engages with the latter's priority. Plato has Socrates declare that 'the soul of the philosopher utterly disdains the body and flees from it'(65C11-D1). [12] He asserts that 'all who actually engage in philosophy aright are practising nothing other than dying or being dead' (64A4- A6). [13] The

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[12] Plato, *Phaedo*, ed. by David Gallop, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 11.
[13] Ibid., p. 9.

philosopher's task, therefore, is to lessen the distractions of the body, to inhabit a world beyond the flesh in which life and death may be fully examined.

The Athenian state ordered Socrates's death following a trial and conviction for impiety. He rejected an offer of exile, instead choosing to embrace his death. The resonance of his death, its challenge to authority, and the principles which support it have been reshaped and revised by successive philosophers and theologians. One such devotee was Cleombrotus, a young Ambracia man who reportedly plunged headlong into the Aegean Sea after reading Plato's *Phaedo*, convinced that his soul would delight in the afterlife. Half a century on, Seneca reshapes suicide along Stoic lines, tempting, with devilish imagination:

> Wherever you look, there's the end of your woes. See that cliff? The way down is the way to freedom. See that sea, that river, that well? Freedom abides there, in its depths. See that tree, stumpy, shrivelled, barren? Freedom hangs from it. See your own neck, your own throat, your own heart? They're the escape routes from slavery. Are the exits I'm showing you too toilsome? Do they demand too much strength of mind? Do you ask what path leads to freedom? Any vein in your body.
>
> (3.15)[14]

For Seneca, the soul was mortal, an inherent body that could move the outer body to blushes, surges, and trembling and would, ultimately, be destroyed along with its host. His view was perhaps best articulated by the Chorus of his play *The Trojan Women*:

> There is nothing after death; and death is nothing –
> Only the finishing post of life's short race
> […]
> Death is inseparable; it destroys the body,
> And does not spare the soul.[15]

This is a desire for death without the promise of a renewal. Notwithstanding the significant eschatological difference between this position and that of Socrates, Seneca is useful in

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[14] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Anger, Mercy, Revenge*, trans. by Robert A. Kaster and Martha C. Nussbaum (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 76.

[15] Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Thyestes; Phaedra; The Trojan Women; Oedipus; with, Octavia*, trans. by E. F. Watling (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), pp. 171–72.

reiterating the notion of death bringing freedom and taking this brief contextual account to the edge of nascent Christianity.

III. Christianity & Self-destructive Renewal

For Christians, Christ's Passion provides the ultimate example of freedom in death: a freedom born of one and offered to everyone. Christ embodies a series of dualisms rooted in Classical philosophy, 'eternal and temporal, divine and human, heaven and earth'. These are ideas that, according to David Gallop, 'were absorbed into Christianity, and have been transmitted across the centuries in its theological doctrines, spiritual values, and ethical teachings.'[16] This thesis shows how these ideas, and specifically the idea of death as freedom, were present in Shakespeare's work and, by that work, further absorbed and transmitted through the literary culture of early modern England, providing a powerful challenge to temporal authority: the authority, in a literal sense, of tyrannical kings and fathers; figuratively, as a challenge to the dominion of death and the value of mortal life.

A useful term in encapsulating the idea of destructive renewal in Shakespeare appears in St Paul's epistle to the Philippians, '*desiderium habens dissolvi, et esse cum Christo* [I desire to dissolve, and be with Christ].'[5] Paul's coining of *desiderium habens dissolvi,* which entered the vocabulary of the Church Fathers and was eventually abbreviated to *cupio dissolvi*, became a powerful idea for early modern writers and theologians that could function

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[16] Plato, *Phaedo*, ed. by David Gallop, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. ix.

as a shared Classical and Christian notion. It was a phrase that appears to have been particularly useful to those navigating the religious schism of the English Reformation. It retained its Classical inheritance of desiring death as freedom, but it also seemed to engage as a shorthand for changing ideas of self-murder and, more broadly, emerging notions of selfhood.

A search of Early English Books Online (EBBO) returns 181 occurrences of *cupio dissolvi* with its alternate spelling and typesetting, but it is not an exhaustive list of the use of the phrase in this period. Many examples of the phrase being used in contexts, such as in emblem books and church frescos, are beyond the scope of EEBO. When estimating the apparent ubiquity of the phrase, we must also be mindful that multiple occurrences appear within the same text, demonstrating the preference of an author for the phrase rather than its broader appeal and application. These results do, however, broadly illustrate its use and suggest that the phrase was employed by the various political and religious factions of the period. The writers that have used *cupio dissolvi* include Thomas Elyot, Bishops Hugh Latimer, Lancelot Andrewes, William Laud, the dramatist George Whetstone and poet William Habington. While *cupio dissolvi* spills over into literary texts, for example, in John Grange's *The Golden Aphroditis* (1577) and, over sixty years later, in Richard Crashaw's poem 'Steps to the Temple' (1646), it was more often a phrase belonging to sacred applications. Its broader literary use, however, suggests the movement between sacred and secular texts of a desire for death as an act of defiance.

Cupio dissolvi also belonged to a pan-European philosophical culture. Michel de Montaigne's analysis of desire is a useful illustration of the development of both the broader notion and the use, or omission, of *cupio dissolvi*. Montaigne drew on the parallels and shared eschatology of Classical philosophy and Christian theology. Michael Screech explains that Montaigne:

> assumed that his readers knew a Biblical tag as current as *cupio dissolvi* and so jumped a step in his argument. Instead of citing *cupio dissolvi* in Latin, translating it and ascribing it to St Paul, he simply assumes that we know it; without explanation he alludes to the traditional French version, *Je vueil estre dissout* [I hope to be dissolved], which, indeed all but the illiterate must have known.[17]

Montaigne's use of traditional French supports the notion of desiring dissolution as a familiar cultural trope, perhaps expressed for a relatively short period or rejected for its pompous tone. On the other hand, Montaigne does refer to St Paul in 'Coustume de l'Isle de Cea' in much the same way as other early modern writers. The phrase was commonplace for the French, and so, perhaps, it was for the English: familiar enough to operate through allusion and shared themes.

I intend to follow the example of the early modern writers and theologians who recognised the potency and scope of *cupio dissolvi,* many of whom are discussed in detail in the first chapter of this thesis. I will employ *cupio dissolvi* as an organising principle to assist in discussing the phenomena of *self*-destructive renewal in Shakespeare. To this end, it offers three significant functions: first, it anchors the inquiry in Christian thinking and so is drawn from the same cultural wellspring that informed so much of early modern literature and thought; second, early modern use of *cupio dissolvi* demonstrates the paradigm's salience in the period; third, its use in sermons, treatises, and poetry allows for a taxonomy to be created from which its multivalence may be unpicked and explored as individual themes in work by Shakespeare that initially appear unconnected to the term itself. There is perhaps little need to explain the absence of the explicit use of *cupio dissolvi* in Shakespeare as the phrase belongs to written discourse, the majority of which is theological. It is not a phrase that belongs to the spoken vernacular of Shakespeare's plays. But I do believe that the paradigm that *cupio dissolvi* articulates, a yearning for God's immanence through self-destruction, is present and

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[17] Michael Andrew Screech, *Montaigne & Melancholy* (Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publ., 2000), p. 46.

pervasive in Shakespeare's canon. I will, therefore, draw on the themes of *cupio dissolvi* and observe their occurrence in his plays and narrative poetry. In doing so, I hope to reveal this significant and overlooked pattern of thought in his work, to provide another article of evidence of his indebtedness to the Christian milieu in which he wrote and performed and give a sense of Shakespeare's careful attempt to explore eschatological ideas within the religious and political violence and tumult of Reformation England.

Shakespeare's exploration of a motif of self-destructive renewal is often motivated by a desire for the individual to be free from corporeal and abstract tyrannies: licentiousness, political and social oppression, and the metaphysical boundaries of individuals and time. Mortal life steers the individual inexorably towards corruption. Those who seek the destruction of the flesh and the freeing of the soul are engaged in a fight between profane and sacred priorities. Expressing this mission as a fight or holy battle is my deliberate attempt to understand how a yearning for the freedom of death is an expression of martyrdom. It is a position that finds historical parallels in early modern England: Hoskyns, More, and Herbert, to varying degrees of certainty, expressed a desire for God as a freedom. Their desire was perhaps for a type of martyrdom, an intrinsically religio-political event and abundantly renewed and recast in theology and literature, variously exploring how religious martyrs could weaponise their situation. The title of Thomas More's (d.1535) poem, '*sola mors tyrannicida est'* translates, death alone is the remedy for tyranny. His desire for death, his *cupio dissolvi,* offers freedom from political and religious subjugation and, in borrowing St Paul's desire, he further develops his own Pauline role. Intrinsic to More's desire, and that of others, is its capacity to defy earthly authority: controlling fathers, sexual aggressors, and the restrictive cultural codes which regulate the expression of sexuality and gender; and beyond, to metaphysical freedoms of timelessness, *self*lessness, and resurrection, to desire freedom found in the absence described by metaphysical poet John Hoskyns (d.1638) as 'beyond time,

place and all mortality'.[18] 'Martyrdom', Dominique Goy-Blanquet suggests, 'is an impossibly tangled mix of personal, political and religious warfare'.[19] She considers the important sharing of the notion of martyrdom across sacred and secular texts in Shakespeare's plays and poems, illustrating the context of sixteenth-century martyrdom against its representation in literature. Martyrology illustrates the religious schism in early modern England, often highlighting the gruesome act of martyrdom itself, such as the immolation of Ann Askew or the firkin of boiling pitch and tar suspended above the head of George Marsh. Their desire for death is expressed in their bodily submission, as exemplified by Marsh, who 'died marvellous patiently and godly'.[20] Susannah Brietz Monta argues that 'martyrologists had a much wider, more pervasive influence on English literature and religious culture than is usually acknowledged.'[21] Monta considers the 'literary reactions' to martyr texts and their ability 'to place focus on crucial Reformation-era questions,' including those 'concerning authority and resistance'.[22] These martyr narratives not only reflect the intense religious conflicts of the time but also profoundly influenced contemporary literature and debates on power and defiance.

In my chaptered examples, Shakespeare's self-destructive renewals yearn for and often pursue a course of dissolution and reconstitution, which is inherently defiant. Juliet desires to find in Romeo a sacred, immutable union in defiance of time and patriarchy, Timon's desire for the apocalyptic destruction of Athens, and by that, himself, defies the socio-economic structures of Athens. Defiance of political, social, and even metaphysical states emerges through desiring self-destruction in Shakespeare. It thus requires an approach that considers

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[18] *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler*, ed. by Herbert J. C. Grierson, Oxford Paperbacks, 2. ed., rev (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 58.

[19] Dominique Goy-Blanquet, 'Shakespeare's Unholy Martyrs: Lessons in Politics', in *Shakespeare Survey*, ed. by Peter Holland, 1st edn (Cambridge University Press, 2016), LXIX, 141–52 (p. 142).

[20] John Foxe and John N. King, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs: Select Narratives*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 132.

[21] Susannah Brietz Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 1.

[22] Monta, p. 1.

drama and poetry as a cultural artefact, articulating a desire within its historical context.

Jonathan Dollimore's study of *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* reveals the

historical range of the union of desire and death in Western philosophical discourse.[23] He

demonstrates the salience of Classical thought on early modern philosophical engagement

with notions of death and desire. The key difference between Dollimore's work - and that of

Judith Haber's 2009 study on desire and dramatic form and Philippa Berry's rich exploration

of the confluence of death and desire - with my approach is that through the lens of *cupio*

dissolvi I explore desire, dissolution and, crucially, rebirth.[24] I will offer a detailed account of

cupio dissolvi in the first chapter, but it is worth noting at this stage that *cupio dissolvi* has

been somewhat overlooked by contemporary scholarship, with a small number of exceptions:

Ross Lerner's essay, 'Donne's Annihilation', which I will explore later, refers to *cupio*

dissolvi and engages with some of the central themes of this thesis.[25] Amy Hollywood's book

Sensible Ecstasy makes a brief but useful account of *cupio dissolvi*.[26] Perhaps more

importantly, Hollywood places *cupio dissolvi* within a broader analysis of the intersection of

mystical theology and ostensibly secular philosophy. It is a connection that I will explore

throughout this thesis, especially in the chapter that focuses on the mystical journey of

Romeo and Juliet. Lerner and Hollywood's contributions are valuable, brief and rare.

Several critical responses have addressed the broader question of Shakespeare and

freedom. Ewan Fernie's 2017 book *Shakespeare for Freedom,* particularly the chapter

'Freedom of Complete Being'*,* presents freedom as a human urge, fighting against what

Freud would describe as the counterforce of 'aggression and self-destruction'.[27] Fernie asks

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[23] Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1998).
[24] Philippa Berry, *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings: Disfiguring Death in the Tragedies*, Feminist Readings of Shakespeare (London: Routledge, 1999); Judith Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[25] Ross B. Lerner, 'Donne's Annihilation', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 44.2 (2014), 407–27
[26] Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*, Religion and Postmodernism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
[27] Ewan Fernie, *Shakespeare for Freedom: Why the Plays Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 243.

'whether and to what extent political freedom can be protected from the violence of desire.'[28]

Here, desire can be viewed three-dimensionally, belonging to both subjugated and subjugator. Greg Walker's *Writing Under Tyranny* explores early modern literature as a 'political tool' but goes beyond this to describe a widespread culture of resistance. Walker argues that the intellectual foundation of early modern society—its schools and colleges—encouraged the free association of literary and historical precedents. He asserts that the use of literature as a political tool, along with the rhetoric training those students received, fostered a culture of lively and often literary disputation. This culture, according to Walker, 'permeated and influenced a whole generation'. Walker identifies this framework in 'informal discussions and improvised speech quite as much as the formal orations of sermons and drama or arguments on the printed or manuscript page.'[29]

Cummings' *Mortal Thoughts*, and specifically his chapter on 'Freedom, Suicide and Selfhood', is the most complete and ambitious consideration of freedom in relation to suicide in early modern literature, considering Stoic and neo-Stoic positions and how these were interpolated in early modern thought. Cummings acknowledges the ambivalence and paradox inherent in the thoughts of those who have looked closely at suicide and the way their argument moves for and against it. He describes how Michel de Montaigne's 'Coustume de I'sle de Cea' 'casts the reader adrift on [a] sea of allusions', a philosophical labyrinth of *self-discovery*.[30] As Cummings suggests, at the centre of the labyrinth is a powerful desire for freedom and defiance. He explains that Montaigne believed that suicide was 'a subject inherently related to questions of human freedom […] a form of resistance to tyranny, both in the political sense, and in the ethical'.[31] Cummings expounds on the nature of desiring death,

[28] Fernie, *Shakespeare for Freedom*, p. 243.
[29] Greg Walker, *Writing under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 20.
[30] Cummings, p. 259.
[31] Ibid., p. 253.

which he refers to as 'a more puzzling and insoluble question of what it is to want something, and what it is to do something.'[32] Perhaps, he suggests, it is 'the difference between desiring death and not wanting to live'. Like Antony's determination to run into death, 'As to a lover's bed' (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 4.15.101), the former is invested with greater purpose and meaning. Cummings explains that desire 'places the contingency of life ever in view'.[33] The contingency of 'to be' destabilises desire, perhaps even freeing it, as Stephen Greenblatt explains when discussing Shakespeare as both the 'embodiment of human freedom [and] a figure of limits.' The limits 'served as the enabling condition of his particular freedom.'[34] Desire is enabled by the limits of cultural and political codes and exposes the 'consolidation, subversion and containment' of the 'dominant order': how it maintains domination, how the subjugated resist, and how their resistance is managed.[35]

IV.   St Paul & Early Modern Self-destructive Renewal

'For liberty I go' declares Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, in his poem 'Parted Souls'. His longed-for departure from the 'seat of life' is a celebration of transplanted love, removed from the torments of the flesh. The lovers' parted souls 'shall be set free / Unto their open and eternal peace', and death will be 'freedom and rest'.[36] Herbert desires a gentle passing from the confines of life into a boundless afterlife, in which a truer, more intimate union may be obtained. His longing for the freedom promised in death primarily belongs to Christianity - the theological reality and resonance of Christ's passion and resurrection to recast death as

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[32] Ibid., p. 260.
[33] Ibid., p. 271.
[34] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespeare's Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), p. 1.
[35] *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 65.
[36] 'Parted Souls' by Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, in *Metaphysical Poetry*, ed. by Colin Burrow (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 38.

the fulfilling event of God's covenant and the central paradox of Christianity that death and destruction offer rebirth and renewal. The eschatology of St Paul is central to the foundation of this thesis, and so here, his summary of Christ's victory over death - while echoed by the Church Fathers and Christian theologians since - offers a useful initial encounter with him.[37] He declares:

> So when this corruptible hath put on incorruption, and this mortal hath put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying, that is written, Death is swallowed up into victory. O death where is thy sting?
> O grave where is thy victory? (Cor. 15:53-55)

St Paul's goading of death, which John Donne paraphrases, 'Death, be not proud, though some have called thee / Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so', offers a radical rebuttal of Death's powers and a profound reassurance of resurrection.[38] What appears as destruction is, for St Paul, John Donne, and many others, an opportunity to cast off sin and enter eternity.

There are, of course, many examples of destructive renewal in Shakespeare. Some appear nihilistic, some secular, others concerning the gradual evolution of a character. Self-destruction appears as an illogical, frequently passionate act of recklessness, but it often drives radical change and renewal. The texts that I have selected feature self-destructive acts connected to death as a pathway towards greater freedoms and renewal. These works explore various dimensions of political and moral freedoms, such as Hamlet's anticipation of political freedom, Timon's hope for post-apocalyptic renewal, Juliet's desire for liberation from time and bodily disunity, and Lucrece's quest for self-authorship. My analysis involves combining biblical and historicist approaches, by which I mean to explore the plays alongside the treatises, emblem books, and historical records of the period and their allusion to biblical language, symbolism, and themes. All but the final chapter remain in some way tethered to Christian theology, and although in *Timon of Athens* and *Romeo and Juliet*, the focus and

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[37] Where I refer to Patristic theology, particularly in the Chapter on mysticism in *Romeo and Juliet*, I focus on Origen and Augustine.

[38] John Donne, *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne. Vol. 7,* p. 1; *The Holy Sonnets John Donne* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2005), VII, p. 16.

orientation of biblical interpretation lie in apocalypse narratives and Christian mysticism,

cupio dissolvi remains a useful interpretive tool.

V. Lacanian Self-destructive Renewal

The final chapter explores Shakespeare's narrative poem, *The Rape of Lucrece*. I adopt a

Lacanian reading, which might initially appear to be a departure from the Christian reading

that directs the rest of my thesis. I demonstrate that Lacan's thinking, especially with regards

to the symbolic, imaginary, and real, but also his theories of the 'big Other', which Richard

Boothby describes as 'the nameless and faceless regulator who oversees the written and

unwritten rules that direct our lives', more closely parallel Christian theology than we may

have initially assumed.[39] Boothby argues that Lacan's ineffable real 'recalls the long tradition

of "negative" or "apophatic" theology'.[40] This is the mystical theology that, I believe, directs

the self-destructive renewal of Romeo and Juliet.

Boothby also explains that paralleling the real with an ineffable, mystical divine is

merely one of the available options. He suggests that 'the second, most commonly adopted

angle of approach to Lacan's treatment of religion […] identifies the divine with the

symbolic'. Through this lens, my analysis of the social, patriarchal imperatives that propel

Tarquin and Lucrece towards self-destruction, which may be broadly understood through the

notion of *Romanitas*, relates again, in a different way, not only to *Romeo and Juliet* but also

to *Timon of Athens* and *Hamlet*. In this way, a Lacanian reading is not so much a departure

but a reiteration of the theoretical frameworks of the preceding chapters. Kenneth Reinhard

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[39] Richard Boothby, *Embracing the Void: Rethinking the Origin of the Sacred* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2023), p. 21.
[40] Ibid., p. 21.

and Julia Reinhard Lupton support the view that Lacanian principles are informed by Christianity, positing that 'Lacan's strong formulation, that religious discourse supposes us – supports and underwrites our very structures of being, subjectivity, and social interaction'.[41] Lacanianism, when seen in relation to Christian theology, provides an analogous method to explain the presence of a paradigm of self-destructive renewal that operates within Shakespeare's plays and narrative poems. As Reinhard and Lupton also say of Lacan's theories, 'religious discourses […] continue to speak through' them.[42] Lacan substitutes a desire to be with Christ with a desire to dissolve into the ineffable centre of Lacan's registers, which may be understood as a type of reiteration of the Pauline sentiment *cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo*.

This thesis attempts to reveal a paradigm of destructive renewal in Shakespeare's plays and narrative poems. The analysis of the first four chapters is shaped by the Latin locution *cupio dissolvi* and the final chapter, exploring destructive renewal in *The Rape of Lucrece*, adopts a Lacanian methodology that secularises the paradigm and demonstrates how destructive renewal might be understood and explored through a different lens. At the centre of this analysis is the paradox and strangeness of a triumphant destruction. For some of the plays that this thesis explores, this paradox invites a new way of understanding them, for others, it disrupts established views and adds to the play's multivalence. In all instances, destructive renewal in Shakespeare are moments of personal agency that often challenge the structures of social and political power, earthly power, in the hope of achieving a greater connection with the divine.

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[41] Kenneth Reinhard and Julia Reinhard Lupton, 'The Subject of Religion: Lacan and the Ten Commandments', *Diacritics*, 33.2 (2003), 71–97 (p. 71).
[42] Reinhard and Lupton, p. 71.

CUPIO DISSOLVI

This first chapter attempts to explain how *cupio dissolvi* can be used as an organising principle for an exploration of destructive renewal in Shakespeare's plays and narrative poems. The chapter provides a detailed history of the phrase's early modern use, partly to demonstrate its early modern salience but also to establish the phrase's multivalence, which will assist in identifying different types of destructive renewal.

 Cupio dissolvi is a Latin locution that abbreviates the words of St Paul in his epistle to the Philippians '*desiderium habens dissolvi, et esse cum Christo* [I desire to dissolve, and be with Christ]'.[1] The phrase and its biblical verse appeared in sermons, treatises, emblem books and sacred art of the early modern period, conveying the intensity of Paul's longing to be with Christ. In this chapter, I will examine its use over 150 years, between 1507–1657. The verse sentiment, that is, the verse that St Paul's *cupio dissolvi* belongs to, appears in the Vatican's Cappella Paulina, commissioned by Pope Paul III in 1538, inscribed above the altar, *mihi vivere Christus est et mori lucrum* [to me to live is Christ and to die is gain]. In a quite different setting, it appears in the tiny village of Coxwold on the edge of the North York Moors. There, in the chancel beneath the incongruously magnificent octagonal tower of St Michael's church, is the tomb of Sir William Belasyse and his wife, Margaret. Directly above their recumbent effigies is inscribed *cupio dissolvi et esse in Christo*. To the right is an inscription which functions as a gloss to the phrase:

> Better is the daye of death
> then the daye that one is borne
> for this is the ende of the flesh
> and the living shall lay unto his heart
>   (Phil 1:23)[2]

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[1] Biblia Sacra Vulgata.

[2] This inscription is located on the Belasyse tomb in the chancel of St Michael's church, Coxwold. It is a paraphrase of Ecclesiastes 7:2.

The Belasyse tomb and the Cappella Paulina adumbrate the quality and meaning of the *cupio* phrase and its sentiment and the scope of its application and analysis: first, the Belasyse tomb and the Cappella Paulina show that *cupio* may be successfully examined beyond its explicit use through degrees of paraphrasing and allusion; and second, that *cupio* is an eschatological maxim that invokes the priority of the soul over the flesh, a priority that may be understood as a key theological feature of the Pauline project. Its spiritual authority lies in the strength of its assertion and phrasing and the paradox that it attempts to articulate. Having these attributes, it is perhaps unsurprising that *cupio* played such a central role in the eschatological philosophy of post-Reformation England; invoked on the scaffold by soon-to-be executed Archbishops, in the poetry of Richard Crashaw and William Habington, the wildly popular emblem books of Francis Quarles, Georgette de Montenay and Herman Hugo, in the prose and letters of Thomas More and serious attempts by Michel de Montaigne, in his essay 'Coustume de l'Isle de Cea', and John Donne, in *Biathanatos,* to grapple with self-homicide.

The account of *cupio dissolvi* and its sentiment will focus on its early modern use, which offers rich and varied examples and reveals how the theme of *cupio* was well suited to a time of such social, religious and political tumult. This chapter aims to use examples of *cupio dissolvi* to demonstrate the potency and ubiquity of this paradigm in early modern culture. I will account for degrees of explicitness: in the first degree, citation; in the second, paraphrase; and in the third, paradigmatic. The first degree adopts a philological approach, perhaps exemplified by Ita Mac Carthy's book *Renaissance Keywords*, in which seven words are carefully analysed to 'offer a particularly sensitive scrutiny of the web of contradictory cultural notions that underpin the language used by human beings'.[3] The second and third

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[3] *Renaissance Keywords*, ed. by Ita Mac Carthy (London: Legenda, 2013). The seven keywords are: sense, disegno, allegory, grace, scandal, discretion and modern.

degrees depart from direct philological analysis by first considering paraphrase and then where the notion or paradigm of *cupio dissolvi* may be operating. To illustrate this point, for *Renaissance Keywords*, this process would involve taking the word 'grace', for example, and exploring its philology through its presence in early modern discourse. Through the examples of its use, a picture of its denotation would begin to emerge, and from this, its notional or paradigmatic meaning as denoting 'excellence and distinction' would become clear.[4] I do this with *cupio dissolvi* for two important reasons: first, to free the notion from the term itself; second, because I believe that to contend with Shakespeare's careful ambiguity, especially with theological discourse, we need to be alive to allusion and notable omission. There is an inherent risk in my methodology: by dislocating the *cupio dissolvi* phrase from a sentiment or notion that articulates its concerns, I am untethering this aspect of my analysis from an evidential basis. I hope to do this thoughtfully, paying careful attention to the limited scope of the phrase and the subjectivity of finding a paradigm of *cupio dissolvi* without the phrase itself. I intend to establish an intellectual framework for *cupio dissolvi,* by which I will read the phrase's multivalent application, and its broader history and meaning, against works in Shakespeare's canon which most compellingly attempt to understand notions of self-annihilation and renewal.

    Cupio dissolvi, for my purposes, should not be overburdened as an interpretive master key but rather seen as an iteration of an eschatological position that occupies and concerns early modern thinking. The danger of diving deeply into the phrase at the outset of this thesis is that it may suggest that my purpose is to find *cupio dissolvi* literally in Shakespeare – this is not my task. Rather, by establishing a clear taxonomy of *cupio dissolvi,* I hope to demonstrate how my paradigmatic elevation of the phrase, by which I mean the process of understanding the phrase as a signifier of a broader sentiment, relates to its early modern use.

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[4] Carthy, p.4.

This approach will provide me with a method of discussing ideas of destructive renewal that will often relate to *cupio* but are not burdened with articulating its specific meaning.

The chapter follows the chronology of the phrase from John Fewterer's *Mirror or Glass of Christ's Passion* of 1534, a translation of Ulrich Pinder's *Speculum Passionis Christi,* to the end of the sixteenth century. It is necessary and rewarding to occasionally divert from this linear chronology to clarify how Classical, biblical and patristic thought shaped the use of *cupio* in the early modern period. After such deviations, I will steer back to the chronological point from which I departed.

I.   *Cupio Dissolvi* & Martyrdom

The early modern record for cupio dissolvi begins with Ulrich Pinder's *Speculum Passionis Christi,* printed in 1507. The *Speculum Passionis* is the earliest EEBO record, and its authorship suggests the pan-European presence of the sentiment. Pinder's work was translated into English by John Fewterer, Bridgettine monk and author of Syon Abbey, in 1534. Pinder's use of *cupio dissolvi* is the earliest recorded use in EEBO. Notwithstanding EEBO's limitations, this record offers a sensible point of departure and one that is early in the early modern period, predating the Belasyse tomb by almost a century. Pinder's use of *cupio dissolvi* is within a passage entitled *lustorum letificat mortalitatem* [He rejoices in the mortality of the righteous]:

> It maketh a man ready and glad to die. And therefore Saint Paul bearing the signs and tokens of the wounds of our Lord Jesus Christ in his body said: Cupio dissolui et esse cum Christo: mihi viuire Christus est et mori lucrum [I desire to be freed and to be with Christ: for me to live is Christ and to die is gain].[5]

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[5] Ulrich Pinder, *The Myrrour or Glasse of Christes Passion [Speculum Passionis Domini Nostri Jesu Christi.]* (London, 1534).

Pinder takes Philippians 1:23 and interpolates the *Lectio* for the feast of St Andrew from the Roman Breviary, in which St Andrew declares:

> O sweet cross […] adorned with the limbs of the Lord, long desired Cross, tenderly loved, sought after unceasingly, take me in your arms back to my divine Master. [6]

The conflation of Pauline and Andrean sentiment illustrates an iterative attempt to articulate a profound longing for freedom, divine unity, and renewal through destruction. Those writers who go on to employ *cupio dissolvi* and its antecedent *desiderium habens dissolvi* are engaging with the same eschatology: that death will end the chaos of mortal life and return the creature to the creator through a visceral dissolution.

For my purposes, Ulrich Pinder's adoption of *cupio dissolvi* is best understood through an analysis of its context as part of the *Speculum Passionis* (1507). This document, a meditation on the life and sacrifice of Christ, reveals an indebtedness to 'Jerome, Augustine, Bernard, Simon of Cascia, Richard of Laudenburg, Ludolph of Saxony' and 'the most important source for the second part […] unnamed by Pinder: Jordan's *Meditationes de Passione Christi'.*[7] The *Speculum Passionis* is a part of the canon of meditations on the Passion of Christ, which Eric Saak argues was a catechetical tool to 'indoctrinate Christians with the fundamental precepts of the Christian religion'.[8] Mirroring Christ's Passion compresses the catechetical outcomes of Christ's life into a single, epic narrative, from which *cupio dissolvi* is a further compression. While the context of Pinder's use of *cupio dissolvi* perhaps demonstrates its place within medieval Christian thought, its date of publication, particularly its English translation in 1534, functions as a starting point for the phrase's early modern use.

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[6] Charles-Marie-Antoine Arminjon, *The End of the Present World and the Mysteries of the Life to Come* (Mounet Sud, France: Tradibooks, 1881), p. 234.
[7] Eric Leland Saak, *High Way to Heaven: The Augustinian Platform between Reform and Reformation, 1292-1524*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, v. 89 (Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, 2002), p. 539.
[8] Ibid., p. 542.

In the same year, Thomas More, while captive in the Tower, composed *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation.* The book was published posthumously in 1553, following More's execution and the accession of Queen Mary. *Cupio dissolvi* seems to have become something of a family motto, featured in Cresacre More's biography of his great-grandfather, published in 1631, and then by Cresacre's daughter, Gertrude More in 1657.[9]

The phrase was certainly present in Thomas More's thoughts during the period leading to his execution. In 1534, in a letter to his daughter Margaret Roper, More expressed his *cupio dissolvi* and revealed its context as an echo of the sentiment that he received in an earlier letter from Margaret. He praises her grace in considering 'the incomparable difference, between the wretched estate of this present life, and the wealthy state of the life to come'.[10] The *cupio dissolvi* theme is repeated in his 'Last Prayer,' which was written in the days leading to his execution in July 1535.

A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation is a fascinating text that reveals the contested intersection of faith and politics. More scripts a dialogue between Vincent and his uncle as they await the imminent invasion of the Ottoman army led by Suleiman the Magnificent. Vincent seeks comfort from his uncle, but Anthony explains that true comfort comes from God. St Paul is recalled through Anthony's message of forbearance:

> to live here in pain and defer and forebear for the while his inestimable bliss in heaven. Cupio dissolvi & esse cum Christo bonum autem mihi manere propter vos [I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ, but it is good for me to remain because of you].[11]

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[9] Cresacre More, *The life and death of Sr. Thomas Moore, who was Lord Chancelor of England to King Henry the Eight* (London: Printed for N.V., 1642). In the digital collection EEBO: https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A51279.0001.001; Gertrude More, More, G., 1606-1633, *The holy practises of a devine lover, or, the sainctly [sic] ideots deuotions the contents of the booke are contained in the ensuinge page* [Holy practises of a devine lover. Sainctly ideots deuotions.] (Paris: 1657). Retrieved from https://www.proquest.com/books/holy-practises-devine-lover-sainctly-sic-ideots/docview/2248536562/se-2
[10]*The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. by Elizabeth Frances Rogers (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1947). Letter 211.5-7.

[11] St Thomas More, *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation* (London: Richardi Totteli, 1553).

The mirror of Christ's Passion is manifest in St Paul's determination to endure Nero, in Anthony's determination to endure Suleiman, and in Thomas More's determination to endure King Henry VIII. In each, *cupio dissolvi* serves as a defiant rebuke against despotism. The same may be true of Hamlet's meditation on suicide, about which Cummings notes, 'freedom from the tyranny of Claudius' corruption ('Something is rotten in the state of Denmark') gives him self-mastery'.[12] The sentiment of the phrase goes beyond fearlessness to a *desire* for death, humiliating and reducing temporal sovereign authority to one of 'the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to'(3.1.64-5).

The *cupio* passage in More's *A Dialogue of Comfort* is composed of an English prose paraphrase of St Paul's Latin locution. The phrase is given an extended explanation by More through Anthony's counsel to Vincent, in which Anthony speaks of those who are 'loth to die' because they lack faith, hope or wit. They are reluctant to 'leave this life, for then they think they lose all' and are prepared to hold on 'even with tooth and nail'.[13] The faithful, Anthony explains, should anticipate that death will 'cleanse him clean of all his sins and send him straight to heaven.' [14] If the phrase itself, *cupio dissolvi,* were removed from this passage of *The Dialogue,* we would undoubtedly continue to read and feel its influence. More extended the sentiment of *cupio dissolvi* to provide young Vincent with a didactic and accessible translation of its message. Anthony's explication perhaps reveals how the sentiment of *cupio dissolvi* may enter into the vernacular of the English Renaissance, unaccompanied by the phrase, free to roam and acquire new meaning in secular texts. This notion is precisely what I hope to demonstrate in this and later chapters. In this instance and later examples, I will return the argument to some of the Classical traditions of desiring

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[12] Cummings, p. 256.
[13] The OED lists this instance as the earliest recorded use of the phrase 'with tooth and nail'.
[14] St. Thomas More, *A Dialogue of Comfort*, p. 155.

death, which shaped early modern thought into what we might broadly refer to as Christian Humanism.

Evincing the absent presence of *cupio dissolvi* in early modern literature requires a sensitive approach and is best informed by first surveying the scope of meanings that were appended to the phrase in its explicit use. *The Dialogue of Comfort*, for example, reveals the phrase's capacity to challenge tyranny, while other applications may demonstrate the phrase's function in articulating mystical, alchemical, and eschatological concerns. Both Fewterer's *Mirror or Glass of Christ's Passion* and More's frequent use of *cupio dissolvi* place the phrase at the heart of the Reformation's religiopolitical tumult. It was employed by those who were most maligned, individuals and institutions that were existentially threatened, such as Syon Abbey, soon to be dissolved by Henry VIII, and More himself, soon to be executed.

The use of *cupio dissolvi* by the Protestant reformer and martyr Hugh Latimer, in his fifth sermon preached before King Edward VI in 1549, might suggest that the phrase operated across the religious divide, by Catholics and Protestants alike. The theme of the sermon was corruption, which he illustrated with an anecdote of a woman sent to court for trespass and having 'done great offense'. Latimer reports that the woman spoke the phrase *cupio dissolvi* at her trial, although specific details are never revealed. He pointedly describes her as 'all on her beads and nothing else, a popish woman'. Latimer's account develops the notion of *cupio dissolvi* as part of the Catholic vernacular, perhaps even a linguistic cypher. His description of the woman is condescending but not hostile, revealing her faith as mystical and immanent, observing that 'she was with Christ already, as touching faith' the 'word of God has so wrought in her'.[15] This description suggests the mystical nature of her faith, an immediate and internalised union with Christ, and perhaps *cupio dissolvi* helps to articulate this dimension.

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[15] The Fifth Sermon preached before King Edward, April 5, 1549.

Another significant aspect of Latimer's account of the woman's use of *cupio dissolvi* is her translation of the phrase, which replaces 'dissolve' with 'rid': 'I desire to be rid, and to be with Christ'. These words, rid and dissolve, are distinct in tone, sense, and etymology. 'Rid' appears to be a deliberate emendation, especially given the similarities between the Latin word 'dissolvi' and the English 'dissolve'. Both 'rid' and dissolve' are frequently employed in the King James Bible; 'Rid', for example, in Genesis, Exodus and the Psalms, for example, 'Send thine hand from above; rid me, and deliver me out of great waters, from the hand of strange children' (Ps.144:7).[16] The King James, Wycliffe and Geneva Bibles often employ 'rid' to articulate freedom, divinely bestowed, from temporal captivity, as with the Israelites from the bondage of the Egyptians.[17] 'Dissolve' is also used repeatedly throughout these Bibles, but its appearance in Wycliffe's Bible, 2 Corinthians 5, is strikingly similar in meaning to *cupio dissolvi*: [18]

> And we know, that if our earthly house of this dwelling be dissolved,
> that we have a building of God, an house not made with hands,
> everlasting in heavens.
>   (II Corinthians 5:1) [19]

This passage is a faithful translation of the Latin Vulgate, from which *dissolvatur* has become dissolved, retaining its subjunctive quality. The biblical scholar James Strong, in his celebrated 'Concordance' of the King James Bible, indexes the Greek word καταλυθῇ, which he defines as to 'destroy, to overthrow'. Strong expounds the term as to 'loosen thoroughly', to 'unyoke, unharness a carriage horse or pack animal'. To 'loosen' certainly parallels the etymology of dissolve, but the 'unyoking' seems to present the notion of a desire for freedom from a bestial servitude. In Strong's concordance of the Old Testament, the Hebrew מוג [melt] is used in Job 30:22 to express a similar process of corporeal destruction, although Job

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[16] KJV.
[17] Exodus 6:6.
[18] 'Dissolved' is used in Wycliffe's Bible and KJV, in the Geneva Bible the verb 'destroyed' is used.
[19] Wycliffe Bible.

is speaking of how the chaos of his wretched circumstances has degraded the substance of his body, turning him to chaff. In the King James Bible, Job says to God, 'Thou liftest me up to the wind; thou causest me to ride upon it, and dissolvest my substance' (Job 30:22). [20]

These Greek, Hebrew, and Latin terms are concerned with describing the eschatological experience of the separation of body and soul. In Hebrew, the body's substance is *melted* away; in Latin, it is dissolved; and in Greek, it is *overthrown*. The process of dissolution suggests a sublimation from a temporal to a heavenly entity; states are not cleared away, as suggested by the etymology of 'rid' or merely freed but undergo a transformation. Latimer's 'trespassing woman' uses 'rid' as a translation of *cupio dissolvi* but, in doing so, fails to contend with the more visceral and challenging ontological subtleties available through 'dissolve'. Her use of *cupio dissolvi* and her paraphrasing reinforce the context of its use and meaning, which is inherently connected to notions of imprisonment and liberty.

The phrase is used throughout the period in an invocative and figurative sense. The former is the mode of those wishing to directly invoke St Paul: Thomas More, Latimer's 'trespassing' woman and many others that I will discuss over the course of this chapter; its figurative use belongs to a literary approach that harnesses the value and strength of the sentiment and applies it to secular ideas. These perhaps include Shakespeare's representation of Richard II's imprisonment, when Richard's desire for death becomes acceptance, and dissolution becomes nothingness:

> Nor I nor any man that but man is,
> With nothing shall be pleased till he be eased
> With being nothing. (5.5.39-41) [21]

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[20] KJV.

[21] William Shakespeare, *Richard II,* ed. by Charles F. Forker (London: The Arden Shakespeare Third Series, 2002).

Reading and inferring meaning from the explicit use of *cupio* is rather straightforward. More challenging is discovering the implicit use, its absent presence, and a diffuse and recurring paradigm within secular, early modern texts. Richard's urge towards death may have nothing to do with a Pauline sentiment for dissolution. However, Shakespeare's repeated use of 'nothing' strikes metaphysical and mystical notes and is repeated in *King Lear*, *Timon of Athens*, and, as will be revealed, by John Calvin and John Donne. Richard's orbiting of the *cupio dissolvi* theme illustrates the interpretative challenge ahead. The most secure interpretative route is to consider how *cupio dissolvi* is represented in early modern emblem books. Owing to their popularity, this may also suggest how the phrase was broadly understood in the early modern period.

II.   An Emblem of Death & Desire

In the 1570s, *cupio dissolvi* started to appear in English and Continental emblem books. I will be looking closely at its use in Georgette de Montenay's *Emblemes ou devises chestiennes* (1571), Herman Hugo's *Pia Desideria* (1624) and the *Amoris divini et humani antipathia* by Ludovicus van Leuven (1629) and Francis Quarles' *Emblemes* (1635). The inclusion of *cupio dissolvi* in these books is perhaps unsurprising, given the emphasis that the genre places on the relationship between body and soul. Each instance of *cupio dissolvi* offers a nuanced articulation of the phrase and, owing to their popularity, assists in spreading the phrase beyond some of the more esoteric texts that I discuss in this chapter. [22] These examples are a pictorial-literary account of *cupio dissolvi*, composed of an image with the motto and often a

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[22] Referring to the popularity of Francis Quarles' emblem book, *Emblemes* (1635), Karl Josef Holten argues that it is 'the most important and successful English emblem book' and cites Douglas Bush's assertion that it was 'the most popular book of English verse of its century'. See Karl Josef Holtgen, *Aspects of the Emblem: Studies in the English Emblem Tradition and the European Context* (Kassel: Reichenberger, 1986), p. 31.

separate page of elaboration in poetry or prose. The image and text offer two separate but related accounts of the theme, which provides scope for rewarding comparison.

Georgette de Montenay's *Emblemes ou devises chestiennes* is the earliest extant *cupio dissolvi* emblem. Montenay uses an abbreviation of the wording of the Vulgate *desideriams habens dissolvi et esse cum Christo*:

Figure 1: *Cupio* emblem, from *Emblemes ou devises chestiennes* by Georgette de Montenay (1571).

The image (*Fig.1*) is from a copper plate engraved by Pierre Woeiriot. It shows two figures in the foreground: on the left, the skeletal form of Death, and on the right, a bearded man emerging from a large sphere. Looking at later *cupio dissolvi* emblems, it seems likely that the sphere is a cross-bearing orb, a *globus cruciger*, which represents God's authority over the earth. Death is supporting the man as he steps from the orb. Behind Death, a pathway rises to a cloud labelled with the Hebrew tetragram יהוה [YHWH], God. The man is being freed from the symbolic imprisonment of the earth-orb: emerging as from an egg, he is born into death. The accompanying French text reveals the type of disjuncture between the image and the text mentioned earlier. Montenay's emblem image is corporeal; the dying man appears upright and smartly dressed. No attempt has been made to represent the man's soul,

which the text describes as '*sale & immonde* [dirty and filthy]'.[23] In the 1584 edition of

Emblemes ou devises chestiennes (*Fig.1*), the French text is followed by a Latin glossing of

the *pictura*:

> Suave mori, quoties scelerum mens libera, nullum
> Judicis horrescens judicium refugit.
> Suave etenim Christo conjungi: et corpus humatum
> Regno sublimè despicere aethereo.
>
> [It is sweet to die, whenever the mind / soul, free of sins, having no fear of judgment
> of the judge, takes flight. It is also sweet to be joined to Christ, and to look down at
> the buried body from the heavenly kingdom].[24]

Georgette de Montenay's *cupio dissolvi* emblem bears similarities to Hans Holbein's

woodcut print of the 'Old Man' from his celebrated work, *The Dance of Death* (1538):

Figure 2. *The Old Man, from The Dance of Death* by Hans Holbein (1538).

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[23] Georgette de Montenay, *Emblemes Ou Devises Chrestiennes* (Lyon: Jean Marcorelle, 1567) <https://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/books.php?id=FMOa>.
[24] Georgette de Montenay, *Emblematum Christianorum Centuria / Cent Emblemes Chrestiennes* (Zurich: Christoph Froschover, 1584) <https://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/books.php?id=FMob>.

In Holbein's image (*Fig.2*), a psaltery-playing Death gently guides the Old Man to an open grave. They appear as companions, the Old Man's walking stick and skeletal hand mingling with the bony figure of Death. In both the Holbein and Montenay images, there is a playful engagement with the paradox and tension of a desired death. But while Holbein's Death sends the Old Man down into the earth, Montenay's image perhaps reveals the essential hopefulness of the *cupio dissolvi* theme, which offers a winding path to God in heaven. It is useful to consider the relationship between these images as articulations of two related yet independent eschatological themes, *cupio dissolvi* and *memento mori*. I will discuss the interplay of these themes throughout this chapter, but it is perhaps useful to remind ourselves that *memento mori* was a topos of late medieval and early modern literature and visual art that articulated a warning of the certainty of death. The topos is active in Shakespeare's plays, most explicitly in *Hamlet,* through the object of Yorick's skull and the ghost of Hamlet's father, a walking, talking *memento mori.*[25] Personified Death, as we have seen in Montenay's and Holbein's emblems, is an unambiguous *memento mori*; it is there to lead the living away and to remind us that Death is close. Holbein's *The Dance of Death* suggests a multivalence at work in the notion of *memento mori*, especially in the way that some images represent Death. The image of Death and the Old Man is tender and has none of the subversiveness that Holbein deployed in Death's handling of rich, powerful and religious figures. For example, Holbein's illustration of the mendicant monk is characterised by aggression and terror: a gleeful Death has seized his victim, who struggles for his life and the contents of his alms box. Holbein's Death and the Old Man emblem has none of the satire of the mendicant monk and is less spiritually optimistic than Montenay's *cupio dissolvi* emblem: the Old Man is led towards inhumation, while Montenay's aged figure emerges from it.

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[25] See Marjorie Garber, '"Remember Me": "Memento Mori" Figures in Shakespeare's Plays', *Renaissance Drama*, 12 (1981), 3–25.

Figure 3. *Cupio* emblem, from *Pia Desideria* by Herman Hugo (1624).

The emblem book *Pia Desideria* (1624), produced by the Jesuit priest and poet

Herman Hugo, visually articulates the idea that death brings freedom (*Fig.3*). The *globus*

cruciger that we have seen in Montenay's emblem survives, but now the subject is anchored

to it, symbolically bound to the earth while reaching towards heaven. A male figure occupies

the emblem's midground, holding a tethered dove, a parallel symbol of the Holy Spirit and

functions as an emblem within an emblem. The greatest difference between *Pia Desideria's*

cupio dissolvi emblem and those of Montenay and later Van Leuven is the depiction of the

subject as a winged angel. This emendation to the image is perhaps deliberate. The depiction

of angels had become a concern of reforming Protestants, some of whom regarded these visual images as Catholic iconography. Alexandra Walsham explains that 'writing in 1606, Antony Wooton declared that the "painting of angels like faire young men with wings […] maketh them Idols, because they are meere imaginations"'. Walsham goes on to explain how Thomas Rogers, in 1607, added such depictions to a category of other images that he judged to be in 'contradiction to scripture'.[26] This observation might support the idea of *cupio dissolvi* being a predominantly Catholic phrase, as in its use by Thomas More, Latimer's 'trespassing […] popish woman' and the involvement of the Catholic Syon Abbey in the translation and publication of Ulrich Pinder's *Speculum Passionis.* [27]

In *Amoris divini et humani antipathia (Fig.4, below),* the globus cruciger has been replaced by a column of stone to which the subject is chained. Her outstretched arms reach towards the figure of Christ while Death seeks to release her from the column. The expression has evolved to *cupio dissolvi,* which may suggest the phrase's dissemination, although considering that the 1629 edition of *Amoris divini et humani antipathia* was likely made from an edition published in Paris in 1628 (that itself was taken from a 1626 edition published by Michiel Snijders just a year after Herman Hugo's *Pia Desideria*) this most likely demonstrates the interchangeability between *desiderium habens dissolvi* and *cupio dissolvi.* However, there are two aspects of Van Leuven's *cupio dissolvi* emblem that reinforce the idea that the phrase is Catholic: first, the similarity that many of the *Amoris divini* emblems have with the *Typus Mundi* (1627)*,* an emblem book created by the Jesuit Order of Antwerp; and second, Van Leuven was a Franciscan. Perhaps the most striking addition to this emblem is the background, which depicts a hellscape of billowing smoke and

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[26] Peter Marshall and Alexandra Walsham, *Angels in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 144.
[27] The Fifth Sermon preached before King Edward, April 5, 1549.

destruction from which ghoulish figures take flight. In the midground, a bearded Charon-figure punts his boat, the ferryman of the underworld, carrying the dead across the Styx:

Figure 4: *Cupio* emblem, from *Amoris divini et humani antipathia* by Ludovicus van Leuven (1629).

These four emblems offer a new perspective on the development of the *cupio dissolvi* topos. Two important observations may be made: first, the phrase and the image articulate *cupio dissolvi* but with nuanced differences in meaning. This is especially true of Montenay's emblem, which shows the smartly dressed man but describes his soul as '*sale & (sic) immonde* [dirty and filthy]'.[28] Scholars of early modern emblem use, such as John Dixon Hunt, have cautioned against the fallacious assumption that the image and words 'constitute a parallel relationship'.[29] For *cupio dissolvi*, the image would struggle to express the corporeality of dissolution. The emblems seem to articulate a desire for heavenly ascension, and when seen alongside Holbein's 'The Old Man, from The Dance of Death' image,

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[28] de Montenay, *Emblemes Ou Devises Chrestiennes*.
[29] John Dixon Hunt, 'Pictura, Scriptura, and Theatrum: Shakespeare and the Emblem', *Poetics Today*, 10.1 (1989), 155 (p. 156).

whereby the Old Man will *descend* into the earth, the *cupio* emblems' desire for flight is yet clearer. In Ludovicus van Leuven's *cupio* emblem, the tranquillity found in *Emblemes ou devises chestiennes* (*Fig.1*) and the *Pia Desideria* (*Fig.3*) has collapsed into a Dantean vision from which the subject *must* escape. The subject's sentiment in this emblem might be better expressed as Marlowe's imperative 'Homo, fuge!', itself a paraphrase of 1 Timothy 6:11 that states, 'but thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness' (1 Tim 6:11).

The second important observation is that the emblematic use of the *cupio dissolvi* topos emerges *from* a close pictorial likeness to the *memento mori* theme of the *danse macabre* [dance of death]*,* to something more mystical and optimistic. The immanence of God emerges through the development of the emblems as follows: in *Emblemes ou devises chestiennes* (*Fig.1*), God appears from the heavens as text; the *Pia Desideria* has an angel figure breaking through the clouds with open arms, and in Leuven's emblem (*Fig.4*), a Christ-like figure is within touching distance. In fact, the resemblance between the central mortal subject and the divine figure may even suggest that they are the same beings at different points along the pathway to eternity.

Recognising *cupio dissolvi* as an expression of mysticism helps us to see how a notion of desiring to die and be with Christ provides a template for romantic love in early modern poetry and drama. Jonathan Dollimore refers to Denis de Rougemont's account of the sweeping history of passionate love in English and European literature as 'the history of the secularisation of this crossing and confusion, of the tragic and more and more desperate attempts of Eros "to take the place of mystical transcendence by means of emotional intensity."'[30] Perhaps more than merely an imitation of divine passion, romantic love is an expression of divine passion through the divinely created.

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[30] Jonathan Dollimore, *Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture*, p. 65.

As we have seen, each *cupio dissolvi* emblem allows us to examine a slightly different version of the *cupio dissolvi* theme. Before moving on from emblems and returning to a more linear chronological survey of the phrase in literature, I would like to explore how the *cupio dissolvi* emblem appears in Francis Quarles' *Emblems* (1635) (*Fig.5*).
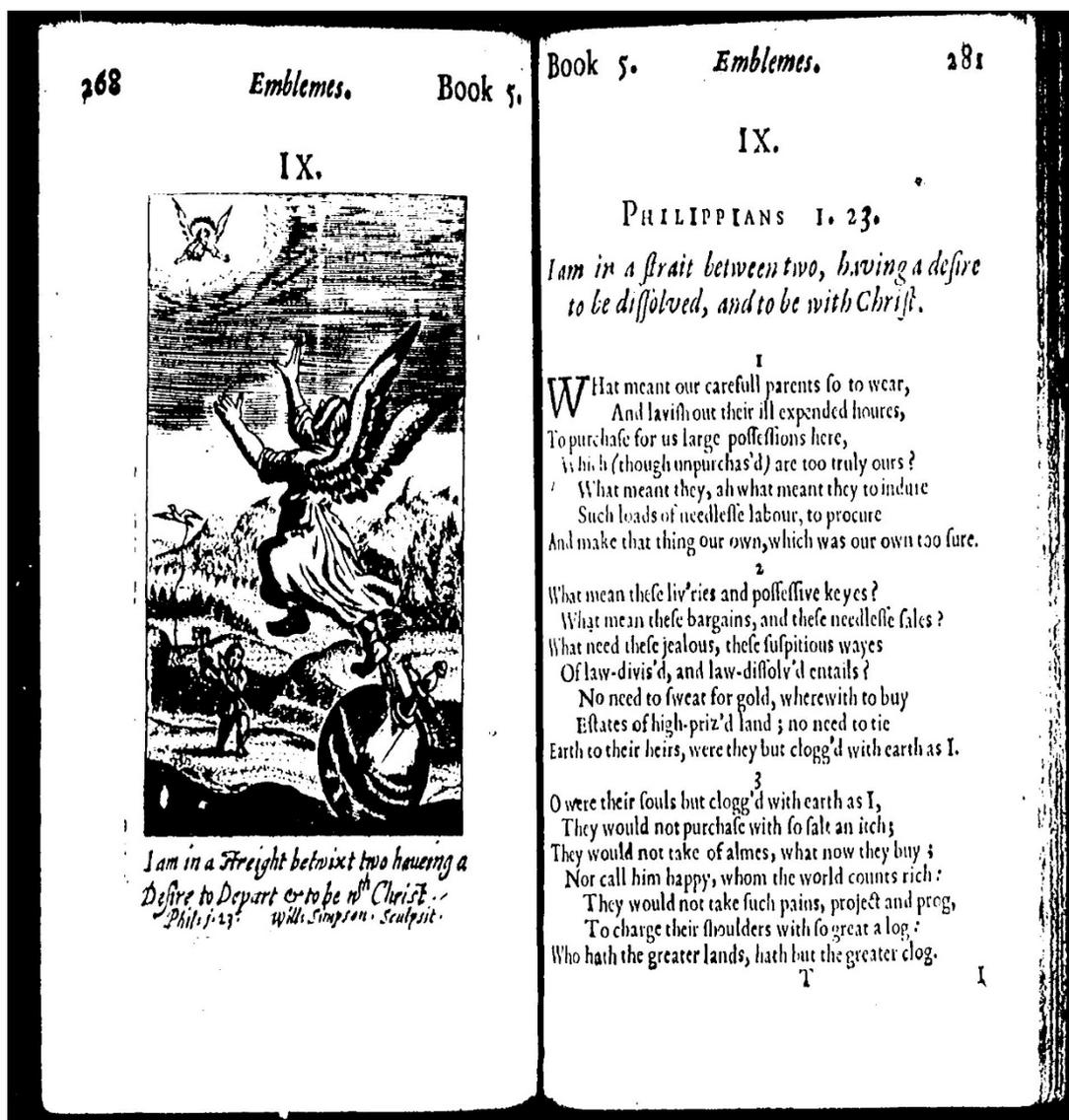
Figure 5. *Cupio* emblem, from *Emblemes* by Francis Quarles (1643).

Quarles adopted Hugo's *cupio dissolvi* image from the *Pia Desideria* and translated the Latin *inscriptio* of Philippians 1:23, using the KJV. Quarles then added a *subscriptio,* followed by St Bonaventure's biblical exegesis of Phil 1:23*,* which in tone is more violent and mystical:

> Ah O most sweet Jesus, peirce the marrow of my soul with the healthfull shafts of thy love, that it may truely burne, and melt, and languish with the onely desire of thee; that it may desire to be dissolved, and to be with thee.[31]

Bonaventure urges Christ to pierce his 'soul's marrow' to 'burne, languish and melt.' In presenting his desire to dissolve directly to God, St Bonaventure develops the mystical position of the theme – he desires God's participation.

Quarles' *subscriptio* is composed of seven stanzas: the first three are concerned with the pursuit of wealth, its inheritance and burden; stanzas four to six invoke the emblem itself, expanding on the way in which devoutness is constrained by earth. These central stanzas rely more heavily on metaphor, describing the soul as 'clogg'd with earth' before using the image of the tethered hawk to articulate man's frustrated desire to fly. The anaphora used to describe the earth's interference gives the speaker's complaint a tone of petulance:

> I cannot do an act which earth disdains not;
> I cannot think a thought which earth corrupts not;
> I cannot speak a word which earth profanes not;
> I cannot make a vow earth interrupts not.
> If I but offer up an early grone,
> Or spread my wings to Heav'ns long-long'd for throne,
> She darkens my complaints and drags my offering down.[32]

For the speaker, earth (she) frustrates his desire. Quarles has articulated the message of the *cupio dissolvi* theme as a lover's drama, the speaker being caught between a trudging temporal obligation and divine desire. In the final stanza, the speaker pleads directly to God to 'unlink my chains'.[33] As we have seen in van Leuven and Montenay's *cupio dissolvi* emblems, Death is responsible for freeing the mortal from its chains, whereas here, and its source in the *Pia Desideria*, Death is removed and God has become the sole/soul judge of heavenly ascension.

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[31] Francis Quarles, *Emblemes* (Cambridge: Printed by R. D. for Francis Eglesfeild, 1643), The Fifth Book, p. 282.
[32] Ibid., p. 282.
[33] Ibid., p. 282.

The epigraph summarises the *subscriptio* and so offers limited new material, except for the use of 'aquafortis' in the last line 'My soul, there's Aquafortis in thine eyes.'[34] Aqua fortis is nitric acid, a corrosive chemical compound used alchemically to dissolve silver and other metals but ineffective against pure gold. The allusion here is perhaps that the tears of the frustrated soul become an aqua fortis to dissolve away the body, reveal the golden soul within and deliver it to freedom.[35]

Francis Quarles's emblem performs several functions in the development of this survey of the *cupio dissolvi* theme: Quarles has translated the emblem, its *inscriptio* and *subscriptio* into English, perhaps demonstrating the process by which the theme continued to be used and presumably understood without its literal use. The message is undoubtedly *cupio dissolvi* - the emblem, which is Hugo's, tells us so – but the verbal phrase *cupio dissolvi* or *desiderium dissolvi* or their variants have been worn away, and *cupio dissolvi* is itself dissolving into the greater wash of language and early modern thought. Having followed the journey of emblems at the expense of chronology, Quarles' *cupio dissolvi* emblem appears towards the end of the period of analysis that I proposed at the start of the chapter, 1507–1657. Quarles concludes this section on *cupio dissolvi* as an emblem and reveals through his accompanying *inscriptio* and *subscriptio* an amplified sense of its mystical dimension. Quarles also provides a bridge into the next area of analysis, that of *cupio dissolvi* as a device of metaphysical poetry.

Some tension surrounds the labelling of metaphysical poetry and poets, the latter a more challenging claim to make owing to the label's potential to artificially limit or expand the scope of the poet's work. Herbert Grierson, however, was satisfied to place two of

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[34] Ibid., p. 283.
[35] The aqua fortis/tears formulation was mockingly adopted by the satirist John Eachard in *The Grounds & Occasions of the Contempt of the Clergy and Religion enquired into.* (1672).

Quarles' poems - 'Emblem 3.7' and 'Emblem 5.3' - in his 1921 anthology *Metaphysical Lyrics & Poems of the Seventeenth Century*.[36] Quarles' poems are *subscriptio* taken from his emblem book. Of the two, only 'Emblem 3.7' alludes to the *cupio dissolvi* theme. It depicts a divine figure with wings and aureole, shielding his face from the view of a mortal figure, who is attempting to remove the divine figure's shielding hand. The emblem is accompanied by Job 13:24, 'Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?'. Quarles' verse is followed by two short passages from St Augustine and St Anselm. The poem and its emblem offer a useful illustration of the theme of *cupio dissolvi* without explicit reference to the term itself. The speaker pleads, 'Let me behold and die; for my desire / Is, phoenix-like, to perish in that fire' (32-3).

Within the context of this poem, which is prefaced by scripture and is explicitly and repeatedly concerned with finding a way to God, we might see St Paul's dilemma, being in a 'strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ'(Phil 1:23), paraphrased by Quarles as 'I cannot safely go, nor safely stay' (20).[37] The poem draws on the mystical apophatic notion of a *via negativa*: that God is unseeable and ineffable, this definition being an abbreviated paraphrase of Bernard McGinn's extensive work on Christian Mysticism. McGinn is an authority in this area, and I refer to his work frequently throughout this thesis, especially in Chapter Four, concerning the mystical pattern of love in *Romeo and Juliet*. Another aspect of the apophatic is revealed by Philip Sheldrake in his essay 'Anthropology', in which he observes a paradigmatic manifestation in which apophatic mysticism 'relates closely to the interconnected elements of self-forgetfulness or self-emptying and to an

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[36] Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler, ed. by Herbert Grierson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)
[37] Ibid., p. 141.

incomplete process of becoming'.[38] This characteristic of apophaticism is equally connected

to the notion of *cupio dissolvi,* which, as I hope to reveal, requires a self-abnegation.

Quarles' 'Emblem 3.7' provides a lyrical, first-person account of the instruction

offered in *The Cloud of Unknowing,* a mystical work written in the fourteenth century. The

anonymous author writes:

> Let your loving desire, gracious and devout, step bravely and joyfully beyond it and
> reach out to pierce the darkness above. Yes, beat up on that thick *cloud of unknowing*
> with the dart of your loving desire and do not cease come what may.[39]

The pilgrimage of Quarles' emblem speaker is thwarted by a type of zealous blindness, the

cloud of unknowing. He protests, 'My eyes are blind and dark, I cannot see; / To whom, or

whither, should my darkness flee' (17).[40] The emblem speaker articulates his *cupio dissolvi*

through the coalescence of terms closely associated with the theme, here italicised '*Death*-

conquered *Laz'rus* was *redeemed* by thee; / If I am *dead*, Lord, set *death's prisoner free'* (34-

5).[41]

The Patristic summaries of these emblem poems, which Grierson omits, reinforce the

cupio message, particularly that of St Augustine:

> Ah, lord, let me die, that I may see thee; let me see thee, that I may die: I
> would not live, but die; that I may see Christ, I desire death; that I may live
> with Christ, I despise life.[42]

Colin Burrow's anthology, *Metaphysical Poetry*, omits the emblem poems that Grierson uses

but adds a third piece titled 'On a Monument'. This poem, which explores the notion of

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[38] Philip Sheldrake, 'Anthropology', in *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 549–68 (p. 561).
[39] *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism*, ed. by Bernard McGinn, Modern Library Classics (New York: Modern Library, 2006), p. 268.
[40] Grierson, p. 141.
[41] Grierson, p. 141.
[42] Francis Quarles, *Emblemes* (Cambridge: Printed by R. D. for Francis Eglesfeild, 1643), The Fifth Book, p. 155.

memento mori, is useful in distinguishing between these two closely related modes of

thought. We have begun to establish some notion of *cupio dissolvi* and its variants, which I

will expand on over the course of this chapter. *Cupio dissolvi* represents a tag or abbreviation

of a self-destructive desire to die and to be with Christ. *Memento mori*, on the other hand, is a

reminder of the inevitability of death. In Quarles' 'On a Monument', *memento mori* is

invoked in the nearness of the body's grotesque decay:

> A noisome putrid carcass, half-devoured
> By crawling cannibals, disguised, deflowered
> With loathed corruption, whose consuming scent
> Would poison thoughts, although it have no vent.[43]

Both phrases present a visceral spectacle of death, which flows between, indeed from, the

putrefaction inherent in *cupio dissolvi* to the bare skull of *memento mori* - to Yorick's skull,

which makes Hamlet's bones 'ache to think on't' (5.1.90). But *cupio* longs for dissolution,

whereas *memento mori* functions as an 'owl of death' (4.3.15).[44] *Memento mori*, which

emerged in the fifteenth century, shares in the historical moment and tone of the unflinching

candour of the nascent anatomical theatres of Padua and Leiden.

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[43] Burrow, p. 66.
[44] William Shakespeare, *1 Henry 6 The Complete Works,* ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).
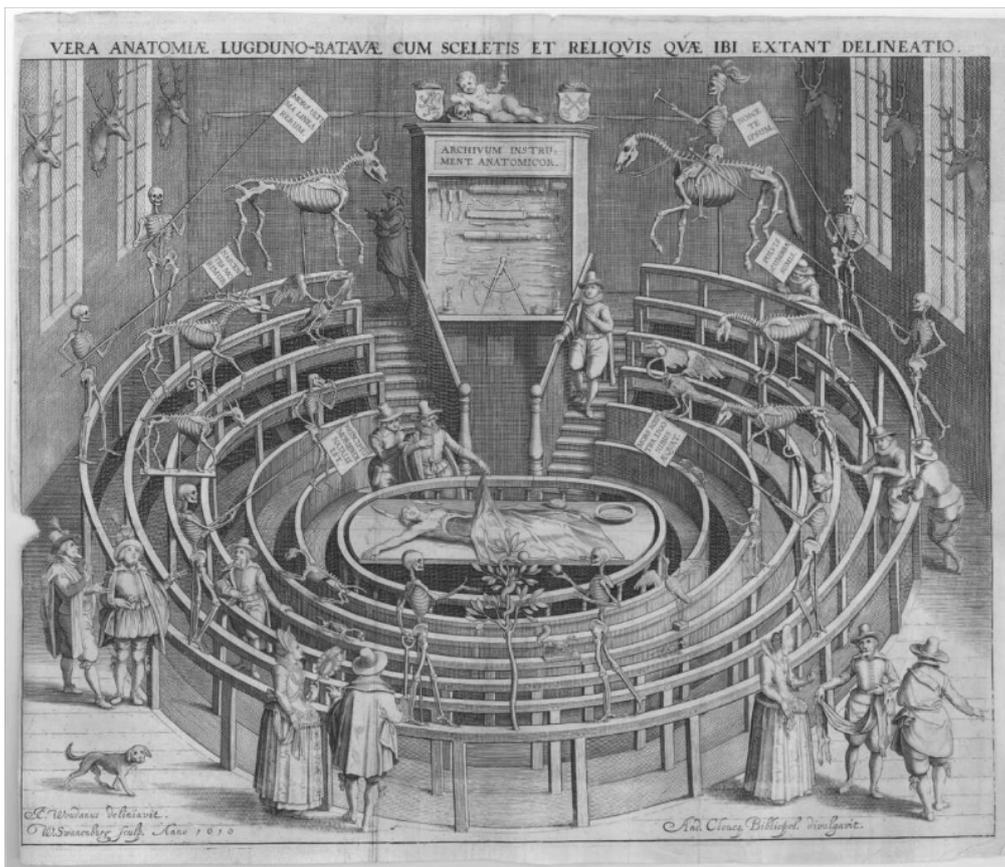
Figure 6. *Vera Anatomiæ* by Swanenburg after Jan Cornelis Woudanus (1610).

Willem van Swanenburg's depiction of the anatomical theatre at Leiden University (*Fig.*6)
reveals a bustling arena of science and show, occupied jointly by the rich merchants of the
city and their skeletal forebears, who fly banner messages from beyond the grave; one reads,
'Nascentes morimur' [from the moment we are born we begin to die]. Swanenburg's
engraving also reveals the theatre as a confluence of enlightened and religious thought. The
skeletons of Adam and Eve stand in the foreground, separated by the tree of life; behind them
lies an eviscerated cadaver and behind that, an enormous display of scientific instruments:
saws, blades, shears, chisels, mallets and what, in his poem 'Valediction' (1611), Donne
describes as a pair of 'stiff twin compasses'.[45] The pageant of life and death depicted in

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[45] John Donne, *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. by Robin Hugh A. Robbins, Longman Annotated
English Poets, Rev. ed (New York: Longman, 2010), p. 260.

Swanenburg's engraving shows the dissection as a performance of *memento mori*. It is

rewarding to our growing understanding of *cupio dissolvi* through its differences to *memento*

mori to imagine how the engraving would need to be altered to express the *cupio dissolvi*

topos: perhaps in place of the instrument cabinet, a winged cherub would appear in a nimbus

of holy light, no doubt the cadaver would be reaching longingly towards it. In *memento mori*,

such as Francis Quarles's 'On a Monument', there is no promised renewal, just a 'noisome

putrid carcass'.[46]

Francis Quarles' *cupio dissolvi* 'Emblem 3.7' has performed two important functions:

first, it has revealed how the presence of *cupio dissolvi* manifests in its absence, which

suggests that the expression carried sufficient meaning to operate through allusion; second,

two of Quarles' emblem poems were included in Grierson's influential anthology of

metaphysical poetry and lend authority to a reading of Quarles' other emblem poems through

this lens. Grierson's inclusion encourages an argument that Quarles' *cupio* emblem poem is a

work equal in metaphysical quality (that is to say, trait) to 'Emblem 3.8' and 'Emblem 5.3'. I

do not make this point to promote the metaphysical qualities of Quarles, but to provide a link

between the analysis of *cupio dissolvi* as an emblem and its more oblique use in metaphysical

poetry.

The use of *cupio dissolvi* as an emblem further suggests the early modern presence of

the theme in poetry and prose; Quarles' emblem book was reprinted 'again and again' with

'over fifty editions'.[47] It also might indicate its geographical spread, appearing across

continental Europe in Herman Hugo's *Pia Desideria* and Georgette de Montenay's *Emblemes*

ou Devises Chestiennes. Montenay's use of *cupio,* in a compression of its long form

desiderium dissolvi, provides a valuable insight into its emblematic heritage. It is, as

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[46] Burrow, p. 66.
[47] Holtgen, p. 31.

discussed, indebted to the visual dynamics of *The Dance of Death* (*Fig.2*). But as well as borrowing from a medieval trope, Montenay's use of *cupio dissolvi* develops something inherently hopeful in providing the old man figure with a resurrection, or at least the hope of one. This is not to make any broader point about medieval theological symbolism, but rather to acknowledge that the guiding principle of desiring *cupio dissolvi* is a longing for release and renewal, not death.

The ideas that underpin *cupio dissolvi,* a priority of the soul over the flesh, a rejection of worldliness for a divine eternity, have been operating in Western theological thought since antiquity. Within an early modern history of the phrase, the French philosopher and poet Michel de Montaigne is a useful guide and bridge between these periods.

III.   *Cupio Dissolvi* as a Metaphysical Device: Montaigne to Donne

Montaigne's use of *cupio dissolvi* reveals the fusion of Classical and Christian themes which underpin the phrase's early modern use. It is partly the product of a Platonic idea of self-abnegation and a Christian belief in the Resurrection. Like Quarles, Montaigne explored the theme of *cupio dissolvi* in his native vernacular. He uses the phrase *Je veuil estre dissout* [I want to be dissolved]. Montaigne's assumption of the familiarity of *cupio dissolvi, an argument that I referred to in early in which Michael Screech asserts the early modern salience of* cupio dissolvi, allowed him to employ the phrase paradigmatically – much as I intend to do throughout this thesis. It suggests that *cupio dissolvi* had itself dissolved into early modern European discourse.

Montaigne's use of *cupio* in 'Coustume de l'Isle de Cea' (1573-4) combines Christian and Classical thought. He begins with the familiar reference to Paul's epistle to the

Philippians, 'But men sometimes covet death out of hope of a greater good. "I desire," says St. Paul, "to be with Christ," and "who shall rid me of these bands?"' He follows this by reminding the reader of Cleombrotus of Ambracia, who ended his life by diving headlong into the Aegean, '[Cleombrotus] having read Plato's *Phaedo,* entered into so great a desire of the life to come that, without any other occasion, he threw himself into the sea'.[48] Montaigne's reference to Cleombrotus invokes a series of death-desiring instances which present the Neoplatonic character of the *cupio* theme. David Gallop considers Plato's *Phaedo* as a 'charter document' and 'Classical foundation' for a dualistic world view which has become:

> deeply ingrained in Western philosophy, theology, and psychology over two millennia […] absorbed into Christianity […] transmitted across the centuries in its theological doctrines, spiritual values, and ethical teachings. [49]

The dialogue of the *Phaedo* plainly and frequently instructs on the dualism of body and soul - a foundational concept of *cupio dissolvi*. Here is part of the discussion between Socrates and Simmias concerning death and the duality of body and soul. Socrates asks:

> 'Do we suppose that death is a reality?'
> 'Certainly,' rejoined Simmias.
> 'And that it is nothing but the separation of the soul from the body? And that being dead is this: the body's having come to be apart, separated from the soul, alone by itself, and the soul's being apart, alone by itself, separated from the body? Death can't be anything else but that, can it?'
> 'No, it's just that.'
> (64c).[50]

This discussion contends with a number of issues that are central to *cupio*: the dualism of body and soul, the notion of liberty in death and the rights and prohibitions of individuals to self-kill.

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[48] Michel de Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, trans. by Donald M. Frame (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 260.
[49] Plato and David Gallop, *Phaedo*, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. xi.
[50] Plato, p. 9. 64c.

On the subject of liberty in death, Socrates struggles with the suggestion that although 'human beings are in some sort of prison', they should not release themselves 'from it or run away'.[51] He reveals that this imperative is contained within the 'mysteries', which David Gallop explains relates to 'secret cults […] derived from the archaic religious movement known as Orphism'.[52] It is necessary here to resist entanglement in the vast exploration of suicide in Ancient Greece, but rather to simply assert that Montaigne's reference to the *Phaedo* takes the *cupio* theme to its theoretical threshold and demonstrates the long history of these debates.[53] It seems that St Paul was able to articulate, and Christianise, this Classical concern as *cupio dissolvi*, which then serves as a highly-compressed expression of a paradox that has been active in Western thought for two millennia. The notion of the soul's imprisonment within the body strongly adheres to *cupio* and is animated through the corporeal incarceration of St Paul and later Thomas More, Edmund Campion and others. *Cupio dissolvi* becomes an article of cultural, philosophical, and theological transmission.

There are many instances of *cupio dissolvi* in early modern manuscripts that simply align the speaker or subject with what is often referred to as St Paul's desire to be with Christ.[54] When used in this way, as a citation, the longing that the expression speaks of remains with or of St Paul. It is used consolingly, sententiously, or as one of many glosses. As we have seen with Quarles and Montaigne, these writers draw on the familiarity of its

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[51] Plato, p. 6.

[52] Plato, p. 84.

[53] For an account of suicide in the Classical world, see Alan H. Marks, 'Historical Suicide', in *Handbook of Death and Dying*, ed. by Clifton D. Bryant (Sage Publications, 2003), p. 307. And, Ron Brown, *The Art of Suicide*, Picturing History (London: Reaktion Books, 2001).

[54] Examples include: Richard Barckley, *The felicitie of man, or, his summum bonum. written by sr, R: Barckley, kt* [Discourse of the felicitie of man] (London:1631), Retrieved from https://www.proquest.com/books/felicitie-man-his-summum-bonum-written-sr-r/docview/2240933059/se-2.; John Weemes, *An exposition of the morall lavv, or ten commandements of almightie god set dovvne by vvay of exercitations, wherein is contained an explanation of diverse questions and positions for the right understanding thereof, together with an explication of these scriptures which depend upon, or belong unto every one of the commandements, all which are cleared out of the originall languages, the customes of the iewes, and the distinctions of the schoolemen* [Exposition of the second table of the morall law.]. (London: 1632). Retrieved from https://www.proquest.com/books/exposition-morall-lavv-ten-commandements/docview/2240939695/se-2.

message to perform in absentia. Another significant example of this absent presence may be found in Nicholas Breton's 1601 poem. *Cupio dissolvi* is placed on the title page, beneath the poem's long title: *An Excellent Poeme, upon the longing of a blessed heart: which loathing the world, doth long to be with Christ. With an Addition, upon the definition of love.* This title, along with 'cupio dissolvi, & esse cum Christo' (see *Fig.7*, below), directs the expectations of the reader unambiguously towards the poem's theme. Breton's use of *cupio* is an example of a work that explicitly signals the presence of *cupio* but elucidates its meaning without further use of the phrase itself. Montaigne's work does something similar, but Breton expects his reader to understand the meaning of *cupio* and allow this understanding to inform the reading of the whole poem. His poem is also unique in its singular focus on the *cupio* theme, whereas Montaigne talks of it within a debate that swings between supporting and opposing the notion of self-killing.
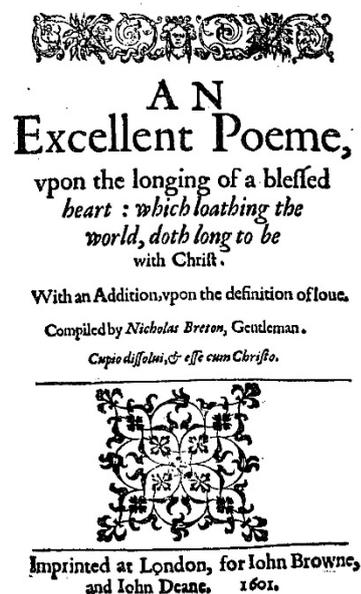
Figure 7. *An Excellent Poeme, upon the longing of a blessed heart: which loathing the world, doth long to be with Christ. With an Addition, upon the definition of love* by Nicholas Breton (1601).

Breton's poem moves through twenty-one social roles, from prince 'unto the poorest state', and makes account of their desire to be with Christ, each shaped by the nature of their trade. For the physician, the sickness of his longing for God will only be cured in Heaven, for the 'true Astronomer':

> that sees the Sun,
> And knows that God, from whom it takes his light,
> And in the course, the Moon and stars doe run,
> Finds the true guider of the day and night,
> Longs but to see his only blessed sight,
> Who Sun, and Moon, and stars their brightness gives,
> And, in whose face, all brightness glory lives.[55]

The biblical character of Simeon features in six of the poem's stanzas to parallel the promise that he received from the Holy Spirit that he 'should not see death, before he had seen that Anointed of the Lord' (Luke 2.26). The speaker begs to depart with Simeon in peace. The poem's title expresses a misanthropic 'loathing [of] the world', which is indeed developed throughout the poem. Simeon represents the honest and obedient servant of Christ and the foil against which Breton describes a multitude of 'worldlings, and their worlds delights, / Whose longing, God knows, is not worth the loving'. 'Worldlings' is perhaps a useful indication of the tone of Breton's misanthropy or at least a great suspicion of those who were easily turned from God.[56] A greater understanding of the power and function of 'worldlings' is provided by Jeremy Corderoy's 1608 dialogue against atheists, *A warning for worldlings*, which announces itself 'a terror to the wicked'.[57] Breton and Corderoy are expressing their *contemptus mundi* [contempt for the world]. Like *memento mori*, *contemptus mundi* is

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[55] Nicholas Breton, *An Excellent Poeme, Vpon the Longing of a Blessed Heart Which Loathing the World, Doth Long to Be with Christ. With an Addition, Vpon the Definition of Loue. Compiled by Nicholas Breton, Gentleman.* (John Brown and John Dean, 1601) <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/A16742.0001.001>.

[56] The OED cites the earliest recorded use of 'worldelinges' in Miles Coverdale's translation of *The Second Tome or Volume of the Paraphrase of Erasmus upon the New Testament* (1549). Coverdale has coined 'wordelinges' to translate the Latin *animales* – meaning 'sensual'.

[57] Jeremy Corderoy, *A Warning for Worldlings, or, A Comfort to the Godly, and a Terror to the Wicked Set Forth Dialogue Wise, Betweene a Scholler and a Trauailer* (Thomas Purfoot, 1608).

another important Latin tag that shares some meaning with *cupio dissolvi* and is a significant

area of analysis in the third chapter, when the focus turns to *Timon of Athens*. At this stage, it

is perhaps enough to say that *contemptus mundi* articulates the priority of the soul over the

flesh and that this contempt for the flesh is often a precondition for the development of *cupio

dissolvi.*

This final section starts with John Donne's treatise on the paradox of suicide,

Biathanatos (1601); then Henry King's *Two Sermons Preached at Whitehall in Lent* (1627);

then Richard Crashaw's 'Hymn to Saint Teresa' (1646); then William Habbington's *Castara*

(1634) and finally returning to several of John Donne's sermons. The chief focus of this

section is on John Donne, who used *cupio dissolvi* more than anyone else (although mostly in

his sermons) and in a way that perhaps offers greater understanding of the development of the

phrase.

Like Montaigne's 'Coustume de l'Isle de Cea', *Biathanatos* is a casuistical attempt to

beat a path of reason through the paradox of suicide. It was, according to Katherine Rundell,

'an extraordinary […] dangerous, and potentially illegal' act.[58] Indeed, much has been said of

Donne's state of mind in composing the work and his anxiety at having it free ranging in the

public domain. Donne's letter to his friend Henry Goodyer in September 1608, the year he

wrote *Biathanatos*, suggests his suicidal ideation:

> I have often suspected myself to be overtaken, which is, with a desire of the next
> life, which, though I know it is not merely out of a weariness of this, because I had the
> same desires when I went with the tide, and enjoyed fairer hopes than now, yet I
> doubt worldly encumbrances have increased it. I would not that death should take me
> asleep. I would not have him merely seize me, and only declare me to be dead; but
> win me and overcome me.[59]

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[58] Katherine Rundell, *Super-Infinite: The Transformations of John Donne* (Faber and Faber, 2022), p. 184.
[59] John Donne, *The Major Works*, ed. by John Carey, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 158.

In his mystical, erotic desire for an active death, Donne is expressing at least part of his *cupio dissolvi.* He makes a point of isolating his longing for death from the reduced circumstances in which he finds himself. Most crucially, Donne's desire is not for death as oblivion but as destructive renewal: he seeks to be like and with Christ in the 'next life'. This desire for destructive renewal is ubiquitous in Donne's canon, especially in his Holy Sonnets (HS). For example, in HS 7, Donne writes, 'And burne me O God with a fiery Zeale / of thee, and in thy house, which doth in eating heale.' In HS 16, he declares, 'That I may rise, and stand, orethrow me; and bend / Your force to breake, blow, burne, and make me new.' [60]

Donne explicitly cites *cupio dissolvi* just once in *Biathanatos*: in Part 3, Distinction 4 on the discussion of St Augustine's assertion that perfect charity is 'to be ready to die for another':[61]

> But when he comes to that, then which none can be greater, he says then, the Apostle came to *cupio dissolvi*. For as [one may love God with all his heart, and yet he may grow in that, and love God more with all his heart, for the first was commanded in the Law, and yet counsel of perfection was given to him who said that he had fulfilled the first commandment,] So, as St. Augustine found a degree above that charity, which made a man *paratum* ponere, which is *cupere*, so there is a degree above that, which is to do it.[62]

This complicated passage suggests that a willingness to sacrifice oneself, to *paratum ponere* [lay down], is an exemplum of 'perfect charity', only exceeded by the act itself. What we see here is a fascinating progression of desiring death. In the third degree, there is a willingness; the second is a craving [*cupere*] and in the first, the doing. Ross Lerner's account of this passage reveals it to be a reiteration of Lombard's account of St Augustine:

> Lombard divides [Augustine's 'perfect charity'] into five categories: beginning, proficient, perfect, more perfect, and most perfect […] "Cupio dissolvi" - a love for

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[60] John Donne, *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne*, ed. by Gary A. Stringer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 15–19.

[61] John Donne, *Biathanatos a Declaration of That Paradox, or Thesis, That Self-Homicide Is Not so Naturally Sin, That It May Never Be Otherwise: Wherein the Nature, and the Extent of All Those Laws, Which Seem to Be Violated by This Act, Are Diligently Surveyed* (London, 1700), p. 183. NB. The squared brackets in this quotation are Donne's.

self-dissolution […] is the most perfect form of charity. To do it - to dissolve the self - renders martyrdom an act of the highest perfection.[63]

Lerner's analysis indicates the prized position of both the desire for and fulfilment of *cupio dissolvi* within the hierarchy of Augustinian charity. It is what Cummings is referring to when he describes Montaigne's 'Coustume de l 'Isle de Cea' shifting into the 'puzzling and insoluble question of what it is to want something, and what it is to do something'. [64] In Lerner's definition, the phrase has been detached from the spirituality that accompanied the examples previously discussed, resulting in a mistranslation of *cupio dissolvi* that emphasises the suicidal desire for self-annihilation while losing the element of renewal. John Calvin's commentary on Philippians 1:23, however, underscores the importance of reading *cupio dissolvi* in its entirety, alongside the subsequent part of the phrase, *et esse cum Christo* [and be with Christ], reminding us that these two elements—desiring to be set free and to be with Christ—must be understood together:

Calvin argues that death in itself is never to be desired, as such a wish contradicts natural human feeling. Instead, believers hasten toward death because it represents deliverance from the bondage of sin and an introduction into the kingdom of heaven. This theological perspective is echoed in *Romeo and Juliet*, where the characters hasten toward their deaths not for union with God, but for an eternal union with each other, mirroring the heavenly freedom Calvin describes. While the phrase *cupio dissolvi* is explicitly cited only once in *Biathanatos*, its theme permeates the text. For instance, in Section Eight, Donne references Philippians 1:23 to describe the soul's desire to be released from the body, although he emphasises the necessity of charity in these wishes, suggesting a more complex interpretation of the desire for dissolution.

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[63] Ross Lerner, *Unknowing Fanaticism: Reformation Literatures of Self-Annihilation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), p. 74.
[64] Cummings, p. 260.

Elsewhere, Donne engages with Michel de Montaigne on the topic of Cleombrotus's suicide, citing Aristotle and St. Augustine to distinguish between a death sought to escape worldly challenges and one that seeks communion with Christ. Here, Donne translates *cupio dissolvi* as a "desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ," a description that preludes his explicit use of the phrase in Part Three. This demonstrates how *cupio dissolvi* operates both explicitly and implicitly within the text, manifesting in close descriptions, paraphrasing, and a broader concern with divine self-killing. The value of *Biathanatos* in tracing the function and spread of *cupio dissolvi* lies not only in Donne's direct references but also in his scholastic glossing, which connects this theme to other theological works. For example, one gloss directs us to Calvin's commentary on 2 Corinthians 5, which explores the destruction of the body and its renewal in heaven. Calvin cross-references Philippians 1:20 to explain how the decay of the body results in no loss, as it allows for closer communion with God—a concept that resonates with the mystical desire inherent in *cupio dissolvi*.

Returning to Calvin's earlier commentary on Philippians 1:23, the connectedness of desiring death and being with Christ becomes even more evident. Calvin elaborates on how St. Paul's longing is not merely for death, but for a union with Christ that transcends physical existence. By weaving together various biblical accounts, Calvin establishes a dialogue between the *cupio* theme and the broader Christian narrative, a dialogue that Donne continues in his legalistic exploration of suicide within *Biathanatos*.

As suggested at the outset of the chapter, three types of *cupio dissolvi* have emerged: first, the explicit use of *cupio dissolvi* or its longer vulgate form *desiderium habens dissolvi*; second, the paraphrasing, expansion or translation of the phrase, for example Montaigne's French *Je veuil estre dissout* [I wish to be dissolved] or John Calvin's paraphrasing of *cupio dissolvi,* which swaps 'dissolve' with 'set free', significantly shifting the meaning of the phrase; third, examples, made relevant by authorial context, that share elements of the *cupio*

theme: a desire for death, and a yearning to be with Christ. *Biathanatos* exhibits all three

versions of *cupio dissolvi.* Indeed, Donne's treatise may be fairly considered a book-length

articulation of the *cupio* theme. My final *cupio dissolvi* are taken from the poetry and prose of

Henry King, Richard Crashaw and William Habington. I then conclude this chapter by

returning to a small collection of John Donne's sermons.

Henry King's specific *cupio* reference is made in a sermon that he preached at

Whitehall in Lent 1626. The *cupio* phrase is one of several variants - by Job, Solomon, and

David - presented on the theme of desiring death, each offering a nuanced version. Through

Job, King speaks of 'tedious months of vanity, which I am made to possess, and the

wearisome nights which are appointed for me'; through Solomon, he complains that man is

made to endure 'labour, and sorrow, and vexation of Spirit' in response to which King asks:

> Can any man blame me to take Saint *Pauls, Cupio dissolui,* into my mouth? *I desire*
> *to bee dissolued.* Tis but Justice, *[…]* to bid the World Good Night, and wish my selfe
> that *rest,* which is the End of *Dauids* wish, *O that I had wings like a Doue: for then*
> *would I flie away, and be at Rest.* [65]

This passage ends with Psalm 55.6, the opening and central concern of King's sermon. The

image of the dove's flight towards heaven also returns us to the tethered dove in the *cupio*

emblem of Herman Hugo's *Pia Desideria*, and this shows the network of allusions that

support one another in their articulation of the *cupio* theme. King's conflation of *cupio* and

Psalm 55 becomes mutually illuminating through their similarities, but perhaps more so

through their differences. It is worth recalling Edward Herbert's desire for death in his poem

'Parted Souls', referred to at the very beginning of this thesis. He sees death as a promise of

'open and eternal peace […] freedom and rest' (20-24).[66] This hopeful sentiment, an essential

quality of *cupio dissolvi*, is absent in Psalm 55. The speaker is beset with trembling and

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[65] Henry King, *Tvvo Sermons Preached at VVhite-Hall in Lent, March 3. 1625· and Februarie 20. 1626. By Henry King, D.D. One of His Maiesties Chaplaines in Ordinarie* (John Haviland, 1627), pp. 22–23 <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/B14338.0001.001>.

[66] Edward, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, 'Parted Souls', Burrow, pp. 38–39.

overwhelmed with horror, 'the terrors of death,' he complains, 'have fallen on me.' (55:4-5). This fear of death is plainly contrary to the *cupio* sentiment. Instead, King focuses on 'the end of David's wish'.

King's manner of expression, 'to take Saint *Pauls, Cupio dissolui,* into my mouth' perhaps offers an insight into the complex associations that are being invoked: mystical and sacral. Like the Eucharist, Paul's 'longing' - his *cupio dissolvi* - will be absorbed and returned to God as King's vaporous words and breath. The striking intimacy that King invokes, his desire for the immanence of Paul's words, the positioning of the Holy Spirit within the mouth, suggests a mystical dimension akin to the intercourse that Calvin spoke of in his commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:8. This is compounded by the use of the dove, a symbol which Robert Ellrodt concedes, in his discussion of Shakespeare's 'The Phoenix and the Turtle', would have provoked 'a dim awareness of the mystical symbolism' which 'would lurk in the mind of the contemporary reader'.[67]

King's use of *cupio*, like Donne's, is the explicit 'surfacing' of a theme that can be traced throughout his work, a theme that is often concerned with the dualism of body and soul and which repeatedly employs the familiar trope of the body as a prison and death as the ultimate liberty. For King, his freedom is 'seal'd up in [his] winding sheet'.[68] Even when he writes of romantic love, as with his poem 'The Surrender', he relies on the body / soul dualism, '[s]o fare our sever'd hearts / As the divorc'd soul from her body parts'.[69] The severed heart acquires an elevated status, sharing the bliss of the soul's flight, its *de*parture from its body parts.

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[67] Ellrodt, Robert, 'An Anatomy of "The Phoenix and the Turtle"', *Shakespeare Survey*, 15 (2002), 99–110 (p. 105).
[68] Henry King, 'An Essay on Death and a Prison', *Minor Poets of the Caroline Period*, ed. by George Saintsbury (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1905), p. 234.
[69] Henry King, 'The Surrender', Saintsbury, p. 180.

The familiar binary that we see in King's work is more complicated in Richard Crashaw's deployment of the *cupio dissolvi* theme (Crashaw does not use the term itself) which occurs in his long poem 'A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Saint Teresa'. Crashaw's poem imagines the body and soul as a single lump of incense, a sublimation of corporality into spirituality:

> When these thy deaths, so numerous,
> Shall all at last die into one,
> And melt thy soul's sweet mansion;
> Like a soft lump of incense, hasted
> By too hot a fire, and wasted
> Into perfuming clouds, so fast
> Shalt thou exhale to Heav'n at last
> In a resolving sigh
>
> (110-117).[70]

The dissolution of the *cupio* theme is replaced by the melting of the incense. This poem is similar to Edward Herbert's 'A Meditation upon his Wax Candle Burning Out'. *Cupio* is, once again, an absent presence but perhaps more visible in Herbert's use of dissolution:

> Yet when at last thou com'st to be dissolv'd,
> And to thy proper principles resolv'd,
> And all that made thee now is discompos'd,
> Though thy terrestrial part in ashes lies,
> Thy more sublime to higher regions flies,
> The rest b'ing to the middle ways expos'd
>
> (7-12). [71]

Crashaw and Herbert demonstrate how the *cupio* theme plays an important part in this type of literary exploration of the elements of spirituality. It is a pattern that one observes across metaphysical poetry. John Donne's poem 'The Dissolution', which may have been written in response to Anne More's death in 1617, offers a further example. Donne writes, 'She's dead; and all which die / To their first elements resolve' (1).[72] Dissolution delivers a return to foundational principles, casting temporality as a type of unstable amalgam of elements. In the

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[70] Richard Crashaw, 'A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Saint Teresa', Grierson, pp. 159–63.
[71] Edward Herbert, 'A Meditation upon his Wax Candle Burning Out', Burrow, p. 47.
[72] John Donne, 'The Dissolution', Donne, *The Poems of John Donne*, p. 165.

first stanza of 'Wax Candle', Herbert speaks of the spirit as a flame that reaches for the

heavens but hampered in its effort by being 'clogged with the weight / Of earthly parts to

which thou art combin'd (2-3)'.[73]

In these examples, the process of dissolution is buttressed by a desire for it. Donne's

yearning is expressed as *his* soul's race against the soul of his dead wife:

> And so my soul, more earnestly released,
> Will outstrip hers, as bullets flown before
> A latter bullet may o'ertake, the powder being more (22-24).[74]

Likewise, Crashaw imagines St Teresa's gentle heart kissing 'the sweetly killing dart' and in

Herbert's 'Wax Candle', the first stanza declares, 'Thou still dost grow more short of thy

desire'. I think that what Herbert means is that the heavenly ambition, which is figured as a

reaching flame, is falling short of its desire. The poem continues, 'And dost in vain unto that

place aspire / To which thy native powers seem inclin'd'. In the second stanza, Herbert

simply uses 'at last' to abbreviate this desire.

Richard Crashaw's 'A Hymn to Saint Teresa' offers a great deal to our understanding

of how *cupio* operates. As already discussed, it reveals the elemental conditions of its melting

and dissolving process. Choosing St Teresa's ecstasy also strengthens the link between the

themes of martyrdom and Christian mysticism. Crashaw presents a condensed biography of

St Teresa's spiritual journey as she travels towards martyrdom, which becomes a sacred

locus. As a pilgrim, Teresa's desire presents itself as a thirst: 'she thirsts to die, as dares drink

up / A thousand cold deaths in one cup' (37-38). The opening line of the poem introduces

Love as the 'absolute sole lord / Of life and death' (1-2) and returns to this idea throughout. It

alerts us to the intersection of profane and sacred desire. Teresa, like Juliet, is 'love's victim,

and must die / A death more mystical and high' (75-6).[75] Indeed, the language that Crashaw

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[73] Edward Herbert, 'A Meditation upon his Wax Candle Burning Out', Burrow, p. 47.
[74] John Donne, 'The Dissolution', Donne, *The Poems of John Donne*, p. 166.
[75] Richard Crashaw, 'A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Saint Teresa', Grierson, pp. 159–63.

employs, especially his use of 'the sweetly-killing dart' strongly associates the poem with the

mystical writings of Origen and the anonymously authored mystical work *The Cloud of*

Unknowing, both of which I will employ in my analysis of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Crashaw's poem is the vivid description of

Teresa's sacred longing, her *cupio dissolvi.* It is a cycle of mini-deaths or, for Donne,

manifold deaths (a notion that I adopt in my analysis of *Romeo and Juliet*) and 'delicious

wounds':

> Of a death in which who dies
> Loves his death, and dies again,
> And would forever so be slain,
> And lives and dies, and knows not why
> To live, but that he thus may never leave to die.[76]

As the poem progresses, Crashaw's orbit of *cupio dissolvi* shrinks further as St Teresa's mini

deaths merge into one.

Brian Vickers complains that Crashaw's images, including the lump of melting

incense and the balsam-weeping wounds, 'seem intellectual, diagrammatic consolations, not

felt human experiences.'[77] This criticism seems to follow a thread of complaint with

metaphysical poetry most mordantly expressed by Samuel Johnson, who regarded the work

of writers 'of the metaphysical race' as:

> pursuing his thoughts to their last ramifications [...] Thus all the power of the
> description is destroyed by a scrupulous enumeration, [...] the mind by the mention of
> particulars is turned more upon the original than the secondary sense, more upon that
> from which the illustration is drawn than that to which it is applied.[78]

What Johnson describes here is the metaphorisation of a person or experience, a

transmutation of flesh into word. It seems entirely appropriate that an exploration of Teresa's

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[76] Richard Crashaw, 'A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Saint Teresa', Burrow, p. 153.
[77] Brian Vickers, 'The Seventeenth Century (1603-1674)', in *The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature*, ed. by Pat Rogers (Oxford: OUP, 2001), p. 188.
[78] Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1872), p. 22.

ecstasy is lost in the clouds and heady scent of incense, as Teresa herself is atomised.

Vicker's complaint that the metaphors fail to invoke 'felt human experiences' itself fails to

consider Teresa's account of her ecstatic experiences in which 'the pain is not bodily but

spiritual'.[79] A useful cross-reference here may be Robert Ellrodt's description of Donne's

'delight in hyperbole', which may be taken to speak for the canon of metaphysical poetry.

Ellrodt explains that hyperbole is 'not mere *over* statements, even in praise, but conceits

meant to express a logical or metaphysical truth.'[80] Hyperbole is not an embarrassing

indulgence but the best and perhaps only way to articulate the scale of the subjects that are

being written about.

IV.   Donne's *Cupio Dissolvi* Sermons

The *cupio dissolvi* theme manifests to varying degrees of explicitness across early modern

prose and poetry. Donne used the *cupio dissolvi* theme in his poetry and the term itself, as we

have seen in his treatise on suicide *Biathanatos*. The phrase also appears in six of Donne's

sermons. From this group of six, I will explore four and add to them Donne's final sermon,

'Death's Duel', which does not use the *cupio dissolvi* phrase but is keenly focused on its

theme and concerns. These sermons, which I will call Donne's '*cupio* sermons', were

published in the LXXX sermons folio of 1640, the period of their delivery running from 1619

–1627, and 'Death's Duel', which was preached on 25 February 1630/1. The sermons are as

follows: 'Preached at Whitehall, March 3. 1619'; 'Preached upon Candlemas day. [Probably

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[79] St Teresa of Avila, *The Collected Works of St Teresa of Avila*, trans. by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1976), I, p. 252.
[80] Robert Ellrodt, *Seven Metaphysical Poets* (Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 53–54.

1626/7]', 'Preached at St. Paul's, June 21. 1626', 'Preached at S. Paul's upon Christmas day. 1626.' and 'Death's Duel', which was preached at Whitehall in 1630/1.[81]

Donne situates the theological message of his sermon 'Preached at Whitehall, March 3. 1619' in the 'Book of Amos', the third book of the Old Testament. This text introduces important themes of sin and judgement through the notion of 'the day of the Lord', a day of 'darknesse and not light.' (Amos.5:18). It seems something of an antithesis to the hopefulness of *cupio dissolvi*, but Donne is using the 'darknesse and not light' as he might the stark warning of the Book of Revelation:

> But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.
> (Rev 21:8)

It is an invitation to meet one's judgement, stripped of 'comminations that belong to carnal desires [...] a man of chaste and heavenly desires only' after which 'he shall desire that day of the Lord'. [82] Like Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*, following his descent into hardship, Amos is 'enriched by [his] poverty, and strengthened by [his] weakness'.[83] In this way, the sermon emphasises the ascetic associations with the *cupio dissolvi* theme. Donne's use of *cupio dissolvi* in the sermon is as follows:

> And he shall desire this *day of the Lord,* as this day is the *day of his own death,* with S. *Pauls* desire, *Cupio dissolvi, I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ.* [..] his soule shall be satified as with marrow, and with fatnesse, in the body and bloud of his Saviour, and in the participation of all his merits, as intirely, as if all that Christ Jesus

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[81] The first, a ten-volume edition by Evelyn Simpson and George Potter, published between 1953-1962; the second, a major ongoing project by Oxford University Press to produce 16 volumes, collectively titled *The Oxford Edition of the Sermons of John Donne* (*OESJD*), under the general editorship of Peter McCullough. The Potter and Simpson edition presents the sermons in chronological order, but some sermons remain undated. The *OESJD* offers annotated volumes of sermons grouped by the place of preaching, for example the Inns of Court (Vol. 4 and 5) or St Dunstan's-in-the-West (Vol. 9). To date, only four volumes of the *OESJD* have been published, some of which, fortunately, contain Donne's *cupio dissolvi* sermons.

[82] John Donne, *The Works of John Donne*, ed., Henry Alford (London: J.W. Parker, 1839), p. 306.

[83] Ibid., p. 306.

hath said, and done, and suffered, had beene said, and done, and suffered for his soule alone.[84]

This short passage makes the intangibility of the soul and its afterlife solid and corporeal. The soul will be fed on the blood and body of Christ. Donne suggests that the soul is the organising principle to all of what Christ has 'said, and done, and suffered'. Donne has compressed into the final moments of the sermon a sense that the soul's desire to be with Christ is matched by Christ's willingness to sacrifice himself to receive and nurture it. This first '*cupio* sermon' occurs six years before the next three of this account in 1626, a year that marks an inflection point in Donne's pulpit use of the phrase, appearing in three sermons between February and Christmas. In the period between the March 3, 1619, sermon and the 1626 group, Donne was made Dean of St Paul's Cathedral and England crowned King Charles I. An analysis of what the 1626 sermons may reveal of the religio-political repositioning at this time is beyond the scope of this account of *cupio dissolvi*, but it seems at least possible that Donne's renewed interest in 'dissolution' owes something to the political milieu of 1626, especially when one considers that the second sermon in this group was preached just six days after King Charles dissolves parliament.

In a glancing appraisal of its politics, one may observe that the first *cupio* sermon refers explicitly to 'matters of state' and 'obedience to civill or Ecclesiasticall constitutions', whereas the 1626 group appears to have retreated from such language. Donne also adopted New Testament readings as the subject of his expository preaching in all the remaining dated *cupio* sermons, except 'Deaths Duel', for which he returns to the Psalms. The first of this second group was preached on Candlemas Day 1626 at St Paul's Cathedral. The sermon explores the biblical narrative of the purification of Mary at the temple following the birth of

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[84] Ibid., p. 307.

Christ. It is a narrative that Donne returns to in his Christmas day sermon later that year. The sermon develops the ascetic and misanthropic themes that were introduced in Donne's Whitehall sermon of March 3, 1619, but here, the tone of Donne's language shifts towards the mercantile and legal, which brings it ever closer to the concerns of *Timon of Athens*. Like Timon's growing hate 'to the whole race of mankind, high and low!' (4.1.40), Donne uses St Paul to invoke a rejection of the material world:

> I count all things but Dung, but losse, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.
> (Phil. 3:8).

This is what Donne calls 'a true valuation of this world' and the 'true valuation of worldly things'[85] a sentiment that is an echo of his 1608 letter to his close friend Henry Goodyer, in which Donne complains of his 'weariness' and of 'worldly encumbrances'.[86] He urges his congregation to weigh the value of the temporal world against the divine, and suggests that they will realise '*mors lucrum* [to die is a reward]'. Donne's pitch extends to a challenge to the tenth commandment, 'Thou shalt not covet' (Ex. 20:17), sanctifying an unorthodox type of righteous greed, 'a religious covetousnesse'. Donne then switches to a legal register to prosecute his argument 'they will *declare* it, make a *petition*, a *suite* for it […] and they shall have a holy and modest, but yet an infallible *assurance* of this answer to their *petition'*. (my emphasis).[87] Donne prosecutes his argument through the allurement of trade, the logic of the law and the authority of St Paul. Arriving at *cupio dissolvi* is the final stage of the faithful; first, they must discover the true value of worldly things, after which they will

> conceive a religious covetousnesse of that, and so come to S. *Pauls Cupio dissolvi, to desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ:* When they have entertained that Desire, they will declare it, make a petition, a suite for it, with a *Veni Domine Iesu, Come Lord Iesu, come quickly.*[88]

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[85] John Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. by Evelyn Simpson and George Potter (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), VII, p. 341. Sermon No. 13, 'Candlemas day [probably 1626/27]'.

[86] Donne, *The Major Works*, p. 158.

[87] Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. by Evelyn Simpson and George Potter VII, p. 341.

[88] Ibid., p. 341.

The authority of the phrase is derived from its cultural connotations – the accumulated

meaning that developed through its various periods of use - the early modern *cupio dissolvi*

appears as a highly-compressed narrative of salvation and defiance, made more potent by its

Latinity.

In the third *cupio* sermon, Donne uses 1 Corinthians to urge a preparedness for death

by rejecting the Catholic practice of purgatory and indulgences (payments to the church made

by the family of the deceased for swift passage out of purgatory) in this case suggested by a

proxy baptism of the dead: 'Else, what shall they do which are baptized for the dead? If the

dead rise not at all, why are they then baptized for the dead?' (1 Cor. 15:29). In doing so,

Donne presents death as a fixed boundary, beyond the meddling of the temporal world. He

later develops this point to discuss *babtisma clinicorum* [a death-bed baptism] and continues

to appeal to his congregation to avoid such a risky approach to their salvation. He compares

their spiritual and material preparedness:

> If thou have set thy state in order, and made a Will before, and have nothing to doe at
> last, but to add a Codicil, this is soon despatched at last; But if thou leave all till then,
> it may prove a heavy businesse.[89]

The message is straightforward: mortal life is fragile; death is often sudden and unexpected,

and those who hope for their salvation should make all necessary preparations. Underneath

this sentiment lies the idea of *cupio dissolvi,* which examines an individual's depth of faith by

questioning the practice of avoiding death. It presents *babtisma clinicorum* as an instance of

supreme spiritual distraction and argues that by preparing for death 'God shall imprint in thee

a *cupio dissolvi* […] not only contendnesse, but desire to be dissolved'.[90]

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[89] Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, VII, p. 214. Sermon No. 8, 'Preached upon Whitsunday 1626'.
[90] Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, VII, p. 214. No. 11, 'Preached at S. Pauls upon Christmas day. 1626'.

In Donne's Christmas day sermon of 1626, Donne returns to Joseph and Mary's pilgrimage to the temple in Jerusalem, where they encounter Simeon. Simeon celebrates his meeting with the infant Christ: 'Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation' (Luke 2:29-30). Donne has omitted the familiar pastoral account of Christ's birth to focus on the message of death in birth, symbolised by Simeon's contentedness to die and the planned sacrifice of a pair of turtle doves (the symbol of the holy spirit). He instructs his congregation to understand 'the whole life of Christ was a continuall passion.'[91] Christmas day, he suggests, should be understood as an epiphanic event that may be repeated throughout the year as Christ manifests in the souls of his congregation. He goes on to explain that these Christmas days will naturally deliver a 'whole Good Friday, a crucifying, and a *consummatum est* [it is finished]'. This final phrase is taken from the Vulgate bible, John 19:30, and functions like *cupio dissolvi* (an abbreviated form of the Vulgate's *desiderium habens dissolvi*) as an example of Donne's frequent use of the Vulgate, which Emma Rhatigan has suggested 'dominated his imagination'.[92] Like *cupio dissolvi*, Donne used *consummatum est* in his sermons and poetry. In fact, this phrase directs us to consider his poem 'Upon the Annunciation when Good Friday Fell upon the Same Day', dated by Robin Robbins as 1608. The poem appears as an early experimentation on the theme of the 1626 Christmas Day sermon, or perhaps the sermon was an iteration of the poem. In the poem, Donne describes the close proximity, the circularity, of birth and death, and by joining together the annunciation and Good Friday, 'death and conception in mankind is one'.[93] Donne presents 'Th' abridgement of Christ's story' from Gabriel's promise to Mary to Jesus's last words. [94] Mary's parallel story is also

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[91] Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, VII, p. 279.
[92] *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in Early Modern England, c. 1530-1700*, ed. by Kevin Killeen, Helen Smith, and Rachel Willie, Oxford Handbooks, First edition (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 573.
[93] Donne, *The Poems of John Donne*, p. 493.
[94] Ibid., p. 492.

condensed: 'sad and rejoiced she's seen at once, and seen / At almost fifty and at scarce fifteen.'[95] The juxtaposition presents a surprisingly human and moving image of a young mother-to-be and her murdered adult child. As Donne says in the 1626 Christmas sermon, 'His birth and his death were but one continuall act'.[96] Simeon's *Nunc dimittis* [now let depart], which opens the sermon, appears rather feebly against the viscerality of *cupio dissolvi*. Simeon seeks a peaceful ascension, something more akin to the pathway to heaven as depicted in Georgette de Montenay's *desiderans dissolvi* emblem, not a bodily dissolution. It seems that Donne's engagement with Simeon's request to 'depart in peace' may reveal important aspects of *cupio dissolvi* and give some authority to the inexplicit invocation of the *cupio* theme. Donne seems comfortable in understanding Simeon's death-desire as *cupio*, although he is mindful to caution that *cupio* should be accompanied 'with a primary relation to the glory of God, and a reservation to the will of God'.[97] Simeon's *Nunc dimittis*, contained within the familiar *Gospel of Luke*, was perhaps an approach by which Donne could bend his Christmas sermon to themes which more richly explore that part of religious thought concerned with divine mysteries and theological doctrine rather than moral and ecclesiastical matters. He argues that Christmas day is like Simeon's meeting with the infant Christ, a beginning and end of mortal life, 'a measure of corrections […] a Resurrection, and an Ascension, an inchoation'.[98]

The final sermon that I propose as a '*cupio* sermon' (although, as mentioned, it functions in this way without explicit reference to the phrase itself) was preached at Whitehall in 1630 and published by Richard Redmer as 'Death's Duel' in 1632. It was

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[95] Ibid., p. 491.
[96] Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, VII, p. 279. No. 11, 'Preached at S. Pauls upon Christmas day. 1626'
[97] Ibid., p. 297.
[98] Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne*, VII, p. 280. No. 11, 'Preached at S. Pauls upon Christmas day. 1626'.

Donne's last sermon, and referred to by the king himself, relayed by Redmer in his note to

the reader, as Donne's 'owne funeral Sermon'.[99]

Figure 8. Frontispiece etching to 'Death's Duel' by Droeshout (1632).

The rhetorical style of 'Death's Duel'(*Fig.*8) is quite different from the other '*cupio*

sermons': more literary and seeking less support from Patristic theology. The phrase of the

opening Psalm 68:20, 'And unto God (LORD) belong the issue of death,' becomes a

powerful and persistent motif of divine authority and, perhaps reading the sermon and

knowing that this was indeed his last, it is difficult not to apply an exaggerated sense of

hindsight. The 'issue of death' refrain seems to be spoken as much to himself as his

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[99] John Donne, *Deaths Duell, or, A Consolation to the Soule, against the Dying Life, and Liuing Death of the Body* (London: Thomas Harper, 1632).

congregation: God controls 'our deliverance *a morte, in morte, per mortem*, from death, in death, and by death'.[100]

Death itself is vivified by Donne, made corporeal with 'jawes and teeth' and delivering us to the equally alive 'lippes of that whirlepoole, the grave'.[101] The mortal body, it appears, will be devoured, passing through a gaping mouth to liquid dissolution. The whirlpool here is a figure that Donne has returned to in his elegy 'Love's Recusant', in which the speaker is figured as 'careless flowers strawed [sic] on the water's surface' feeble to the female subject, whose forces 'suck, smack and embrace, / Yet drown them.'[102] In both 'Love's Recusant' and 'Death's Duel', the paradox of the womb as a place of death is presented:

> For in our mothers wombe wee are dead so, as that wee doe not know wee live […] neither is there any grave so close, or so putrid a prison, as the wombe[103]

Although this description of the womb is specific to the stillbirth of a baby and suggests the consequent death of the mother, its tone is surprisingly vitriolic. Donne speaks of being 'taught cruelty' in the womb 'by being fed with blood' and of the womb as a creator, not of life but of flesh that embodies sin and imprisons the soul. For Donne, the womb is the source of the first 'manifold deathes of this world', experienced as wayfare along a lifetime's pilgrimage towards the grave. He describes this first deliverance from death and into death:

> Wee have a winding sheete in our Mothers wombe, which growes with us from our conception, and we come into the world, wound up in that *winding sheet,* for wee come to seeke a grave.[104]

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100 Ibid., p. 5.
101 Ibid., p. 5.
102 Donne, *The Poems of John Donne*, p. 315.
103 Donne, *Deaths Duell, or, A Consolation to the Soule, against the Dying Life, and Liuing Death of the Body*, p. 5.
104 Ibid., p. 9.

The thrum of Donne's unmentioned *cupio dissolvi,* urging us to 'seeke a grave', is with us from birth. The pressure that Donne has applied to 'grave' and 'womb' in employing one as a figure for the other has dissolved the boundary between them, allowing us to see, in a strikingly prescient way, that this version of *cupio dissolvi* is both a march towards the grave and a longing to return to the mother's womb. We are born into death, and for death, 'our circle made up in the first point thereof'.[105]

Indeed, there is a tangible shape and sequence to the sermon*:* as we have seen, the circularity of life and death; the tripartite division of the sermon, as suggested in Donne's margin notes; and a certain focus on the parallel notions of the Old Testament's Week of Creation and the New Testament's Week of Death, the Week of Passion. Jonquil Bevan's study of the structure of *Death's Duel* offers an account of these points, especially the structure of paragraphs as a correspondence to the *hebdomada mortium* [the week of death]. She explains that 'the whole sermon, which the opening paragraph declares to be a building in the dimension of space, is also a week in the dimension of time'.[106] Donne's manipulation of time and space attests to the theological scale of the sermon and its message of desiring death. Rather than destabilising notions of time and space, Donne reveals the patterns that reside in and connect these metaphysical elements; he then allows them to shape the structure of the sermon itself.

Donne returns to the circularity of man's birth and death, imagining a 'pilgrimage' through infancy into youth, age, and death. It is not, he cautions his congregation, 'as a Phoenix out of the ashes of another Phoenix formally dead, but […] as a Snake out of dung' each successive death resulting in an ever-deeper descent. What Donne describes is a series of 'manifold deaths of this world, […] *every days death* and *the every hours death,* by that

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[105] Ibid., p. 9.

[106] Jonquil Bevan, 'Hebdomada Mortium: The Structure of Donne's Last Sermon', *The Review of English Studies*, 45.178 (1994), 185–203 (p. 202).

one death, the *finall dissolution* of body and soule*, the end of all.'* [107] I will later chart this

pilgrimage in *Romeo and Juliet* and employ Donne's suggestion of manifold deaths, as

revealed in the play's structure, to account for the desire for divine dissolution. Indeed, the

parallels between elements of *Romeo and Juliet* and *Death's Duel* are striking: besides the

pilgrimage motif and manifold deaths, both texts share a fascination with the grave as a

womb and delight in its gruesomeness.

  Death's Duel imagines the ultimate death as '*corruption and putrefaction* and

vermiculation and *incineration'*.[108] Donne suggests that without a soul, the body will collapse

into a state of impurity and rottenness; it will become infested with worms, and, finally, it

will be consumed by fire. He is describing a 'posthume' death, a notion central to the

meaning of *cupio dissolvi*, taking the phrase beyond the loosening of body and soul to an

appreciation of the *process* of corporeal dissolution. This unflinching iteration of *cupio*

relates to the Dance of Death in its show of decay, but Donne, like Shakespeare before him,

takes us into the grave itself. The vermiculation of the body vivifies death. Donne's

description of the worms' progress through a corpse is astonishingly explicit, especially when

one remembers the sermon was delivered before the King. He explains that 'when these

bodies that have been *children of royall parents*, and the *parents of royall children*' must say

to the worm 'thou art my mother and sister […] and my selfe. *Miserable incest,* when I must

bee *married* to my *mother* and my *sister*, and bee both *father and mother* to *my owne mother*

and sister, *beget* and *beare that* worme'.[109] It is a notion somewhat shared by Hamlet when

he muses, 'A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king and eat of the fish that hath

fed of that worm' (4.3.30). The levelling function of the worm is invoked throughout the

bible, and it is from Job that Donne claims instruction here, although the focus that Donne

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[107] Donne, *Deaths Duell, or, A Consolation to the Soule, against the Dying Life, and Liuing Death of the Body*, p. 14.

[108] Ibid., p. 20.

[109] Ibid., p. 21.

applies to the king, his wife and children makes the worm a member of the royal family and a traitorous regicide.

Donne's description of the body's dissolution, this version of *cupio dissolvi*, with its focus on *dissolvi,* is an exploration of the notion of boundaries; social, sexual and physical - the worm knows none and makes its implacable progress through the solid flesh of its hosts. Donne imagines an orgiastic scene of 'putrefaction' and 'miserable incest' in which the physical frontier of the individual is dissolved.[110] Vermiculation transmutes the body to dust, fulfilling the assertion of Ecclesiastes, 'all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again'(Ecclesiastes 3.20). Donne's sermon takes this simple biblical idiom and follows its assertion back to and into the royal grave. He describes the confinement of the king as dust within a corner of his coffin. Eventually, the dust is 'mingled with the dust of every highway, and of every dunghill, and swallowed in every puddle and pond'.[111] It is strikingly similar to Hamlet's description of 'Imperial Caesar, [who] dead and turned to clay, / Might stop a hole to keep the wind away' (V.1.209).[112] Donne describes this process of becoming dust as the '*nullification* of man'(6), the first recorded instance of this noun, which the OED defines as a 'reduction to nothing'. [113]

Death's Duel tilts the meaning of *cupio dissolvi* towards the process of dissolution, not as a figurative or abstract notion, as one may read the dissolution of the bonds between body and soul, but in the physical reality of the body's decomposition. The politics of human dissolution, the progress of the worm and the dispersal of the body's dust into dunghills and puddles, finds authority and political justification in the books of Job and Ecclesiastes: 'All things come alike to all'(Ecclesiastes 9.2). But the language of Donne's sermon and the

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[110] Ibid., p. 20.
[111] Ibid. p. 22.
[112] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson, Neil Taylor, and Richard Proudfoot, The Arden Shakespeare: Third Series / General Ed.: Richard Proudfoot, Reprinted (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
[113] 'nullification', in *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2023. Web. 12 April 2022.

context of its oration reveal a version of *cupio dissolvi* that is gruesome and politically fearless.

I have explored the multivalent applications of this phrase, harnessed by Thomas More in the Tower and by William Laud on the scaffold, in the mass-printed emblem books in England and on the continent. I have attempted to argue that *cupio dissolvi* can also operate inexplicitly as a notion or theme, an argument best evidenced through an analysis of early modern poetry. I draw two conclusions from this exploration of *cupio dissolvi* in the prose and poetry of early modern England. First, use dictates meaning: to understand *cupio dissolvi,* we must scrutinise its application and the motives of its users. That said, the writers of *cupio dissolvi* tend to use the phrase to articulate a rejection of the flesh and worldly power, using *cupio dissolvi* to articulate a desire for martyrdom. Second, the occurrence of the phrase serves to direct our attention to a particular writer, branch of literature or theology, but *cupio dissolvi* is just the surfacing of an eschatological theme that emerged in the Classical world without a label (and without God). It flourished in the early modern period as an articulation of resistance and faith and shaped the literature that attempted to fathom the relationship between temporality and divinity. Its influence may be read in the works of Shakespeare: in Juliet's plea to the dagger, 'let me die' (5.3.169); in Timon's call for apocalyptic destruction; and in Hamlet's desire that his 'too too solid flesh would melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew' (1.2.129-30).

HAMLET: FLESH AND THOUGHT

I.   Shakespeare's *Cupio*

The first chapter provided an account of *cupio dissolvi* in early modern religious treatises, emblem books, sermons, and literature. It argued that *cupio dissolvi* is a recurrent and compelling theme in early modern thought. Its application may be explicit, through a translation or revision of its key terms, or as a diffuse theme. This chapter explores how the philosophical impulse encapsulated in the phrase informs and operates within *Hamlet*; how, for example, the 'solid flesh' soliloquy in Act One, Scene Two, of *Hamlet*, when considered as an expression of *cupio*, reveals a stronger tethering to faith and resurrection than has been thought. This chapter focuses on the relationship between *cupio dissolvi* and Shakespeare. It functions as a bridge between the analysis of *cupio* as a term and paradigm.

The *cupio* theme articulates a notion of destructive renewal, tainted corporeality, dissolution, and resurrection. The phrase's constituent parts overlap several theological and philosophical positions and share some of the concerns of other early modern topoi, such as *memento mori* and *contemptus mundi*. Hamlet engages with these themes and philosophical concerns throughout the play but some areas of the text provide especially rich examples. This chapter's analysis will focus on these areas, scenes with a clear link to *memento mori* and *contemptus mundi* to see if the theme of *cupio dissolvi* is also present and how this might illuminate our understanding of Hamlet, as a character, and the play.

This chapter posits a link between the theme of *cupio dissolvi* and *Hamlet* despite not having any evidence of the phrase's explicit use in the play, or indeed in the rest of Shakespeare's plays and poems. As discussed in Chapter One, *cupio dissolvi* was a frequently used phrase in the early modern period, but its religious and literary attractiveness did not translate to the stage or, for that matter, to Shakespeare's poems. This chapter will

argue that Shakespeare did not overlook or reject *cupio dissolvi* but engaged with the theme's philosophical dilemmas through rhetorical and stylistic devices. Shakespeare's hidden *cupio* will be revealed over the course of this chapter and in different ways in subsequent chapters by a close reading of scenes and passages that deal with issues of desired destruction and renewal. Before this analysis begins, it might be useful to address the absence of *cupio dissolvi* in Shakespeare's work and suggest three possible reasons for its exclusion.

The first issue is of linguistic trends. EEBO returns 181 results for *cupio dissolvi* or *cupio dissolui,* a further 58 for *desiderium habens dissolvi* or *desiderium habens dissolui.* For comparison, over the same period, *memento mori* [remember you must die] returns 580 results. These data indicate that *desiderium habens dissolvi,* and its paraphrase *cupio dissolvi,* was significantly less popular than *memento mori* in early modern literature. However, owing to the broad application of this popular phrase against the very particular desire expressed by *cupio dissolvi,* perhaps this result is unsurprising. Also, *memento mori*, which was first recorded in John Mirk's *Liber Festivalis* (1486), a hugely influential and widely disseminated book, had a forty-year head-start on *cupio dissolvi.* It is worth noting that this timeline, while useful in illustrating the early modern record of these Latin locutions, is limited to the print record drawn from EEBO; *memento mori*, like *cupio dissolvi*, dates back to the Church Fathers and into antiquity. What is perhaps more revealing is the surge in popularity that *cupio dissolvi* experienced between 1620–1650. This surge in the printed record of *cupio dissolvi* is paralleled by an even greater surge in the use of *memento mori* over the same period and is likely the result of the increase in printing during this period.[1] *Cupio dissolvi* and other Latin locutions appeared in a greater number of published works, although its frequency relative to the total number of books published is perhaps harder to calculate. What

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[1] EEBO returns 50 records for *cupio dissolvi* over the period 1519–1620 and 95 records for *memento mori*. In the 40 years that followed, *cupio dissolvi* records increased to 80, a 160% increase: *memento mori* increased to 221, a 230% increase.

this would suggest is that *cupio dissolvi* was more broadly consumed in the period following

the composition of Shakespeare's plays and poems and perhaps indicates that during

Shakespeare's writing career, *cupio dissolvi* was more confined to the religious sphere. That

does not mean, however, that the notion of *cupio dissolvi* was as remote as the phrase itself.

Its themes of dissolution, worldliness, and freedom were some of the growing concerns of

Reformation England.

The second reason why we might expect not to find *cupio dissolvi* in Shakespeare

involves the social function of Latin on stage. Latin in Shakespeare is more frequently used

by characters of professional or lower social classes, often to demonstrate learning or

ignorance. *Cupio dissolvi* does not lend itself to this type of function, particularly humour.

When Shakespeare grapples with the most profound and searching issues, such as suicide,

and the afterlife and murder, he uses English.[2]

The third reason for the absence of *cupio dissolvi* in Shakespeare is the risk it poses to

the delicately poised religious and political ambivalence of his plays and poems. Michael

O'Connell describes Shakespeare's 'disinclination to fasten definitively on expression that is

Protestant or Catholic'.[3] *Cupio dissolvi* emerged in the early modern period from the treatises

and sermons of Jesuits and recalcitrant Catholics, like John Fewterer and Thomas More, and

the phrase likely retained a Catholic nuance, even from the pulpit of later Protestant thinkers

such as Hugh Latimer. Hamlet's thoughts on the afterlife, for example, flit between Catholic

notions of purgatory and Protestant ideas of predestination. Stephen Greenblatt is useful to

this argument; he asserts that in *Hamlet* there is 'a pervasive pattern, a deliberate forcing

together of radically incompatible accounts of almost everything that matters', which may

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[2] Jonathan Culpeper, 'Shakespeare's Latin' Lecture presentation:
https://wp.lancs.ac.uk/shakespearelang/files/2021/02/Shakespeares-Latin-Uppsala.pdf. Accessed: 3 March 2023.
[3] Michael O'Connell, '"The Juice of Egypt's Grape": Plutarch, Syncretism, and Anthony and Cleopatra', in
Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage
(London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 195–209 (p. 206).

manifest in what Jean-Christophe Mayer argues is a hybridity in Shakespeare's presentation of faith.[4] A phrase such as *cupio dissolvi* may have suggested too much certainty of faith and implies too much Catholicism. If Shakespeare had used *cupio dissolvi* for characterisation or even satire, for example having it spoken by Friar Lawrence, it may have unhelpfully placed the character in the company of other Catholic martyrs. In taking account of these possible reasons for the absence of the phrase *cupio dissolvi* in Shakespeare's work - its limited use until the 1620s, the possible function of Latin on the early modern stage and its risky religious and political associations - the absence of the *cupio dissolvi* phrase in Shakespeare is not a flaw in my argument but something that is to be expected. It is my argument, however, that with careful reading we will identify the absent presence of the phrase in *Hamlet* and across other areas of Shakespeare's work and imagination.

The structure of this chapter mirrors that of the thesis, initially engaging with a fairly explicit articulation of *cupio dissolvi* before moving out and on to the related themes, suggested above. I undertake three things: first, to establish the latency of faith in Hamlet's self-destructive thoughts; second, to situate his use of the *cupio* metaphor within the categories that I have outlined; third, to explore how Hamlet's self-destructive ideation reveals an emerging and complex dialectic between faith and reason. This approach will focus my analysis, demonstrate the value of an expanded investigation of the relationship between *cupio* and Shakespeare and provide a bridge to further analysis that relates to the nature of destructive renewal in Shakespeare's plays and poetry, independent of the phrase.

Several key moments in the play merit close attention: the 'solid flesh' soliloquy of 1.2; Hamlet's discussion with Polonius, immediately followed by his discussion with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern of 2.2, and 3.1; a brief consideration of the language used in

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[4] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, Princeton Classics, 1. Princeton Classics edn. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 240;Jean-Christophe Mayer, *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith: History, Religion, and the Stage*, Early Modern Literature in History (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

3.3; the 'what a thing is a man' soliloquy; the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy; and the 'Gravedigger scene', 5.1.[5] In other areas of this thesis, I use single editions of plays and poems, and when using *cupio dissolvi* I have maintained a focus on Philippians 1:23. In this chapter, I will employ alternate texts (Q1, Q2 and F) as well as broadening my focus on Philippians to include the preceding line, Philippians 1:22. The following section provides an outline of the merits of these decisions and acknowledges their potential complications.

II.   *Cupio dissolvi* in Hamlet's Quartos and Folio

This chapter uses the Quartos and Folio editions of *Hamlet.* The Arden edition (third series) is the 'control' text alongside occasional references to the First Quarto (Q1) and the First Folio (F). The analysis reveals Hamlet's self-destructive urges, specifically how the dualism of body and soul is replaced with flesh and thought, part of my third stream of inquiry, relating to Hamlet's navigation of faith and reason. I will also extend my area of focus on Philippians to encompass the preceding line. Here are both lines, the previously discussed 1:23, and its preceding line. I have placed them together to illustrate how they may function as a series of closely connected thoughts:

> And whether to live in the flesh *were* profitable for me, and what to choose I know not.

> For I am distressed between both, desiring to be loosed and to be with Christ, which is best of all (Phil. 1:23).[6]

And in the Vulgate bible:

> Quod si vivere in carne, hic mihi fructus operis est, *et quid eligam ignoro.* Coarctor autem e duobus: desiderium habens dissolvi, et esse cum Christo, multo magis melius[7]

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[5] For simplicity, I will use the Q2 spellings for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern throughout.
[6] GEN, Phil, 1:23.
[7] Biblia Sacra Vulgata, Phil.1:22-23

Each line reveals a distinct aspect of the *cupio dissolvi* sentiment; in 1:23, as we have seen, Paul desires to dissolve and return to Christ; in 1:22, he speaks of confusion in the choice between living and dying. St Paul's choice may be latent in Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' soliloquy, and no doubt elsewhere, as may, also, his desire to dissolve – 'o that this too too sallied flesh would melt' (1.2.129-30). Later in this thesis, I uncouple *cupio dissolvi* from its direct associations with St Paul and allow it to speak of a desire for destruction and rebirth that may be a deferred reference to Christianity but expressed in secular contexts. My focus here with *Hamlet* is to scrutinise the Christian desire for dissolution and resurrection, and relates to my first objective, as outlined above, to unearth this latency of faith while acknowledging its interplay with reason.

III.   Flesh

Hamlet's first soliloquy, which begins 'O that this too too sallied flesh would melt' (1.2.129), offers an opportunity to capture the direction of his thinking before it is complicated by his meeting with the Ghost in Act One, Scene 4. It is a speech that can be divided into two parts: the first nine lines expressing Hamlet's world-weariness and his inclination towards suicide; the remaining twenty-three lines, his incredulity and disgust about his mother's hasty remarriage. Q2 and F offer similar accounts of this soliloquy, but Q1 is subject to the types of abbreviation and simplification that we see across this particular text - the opening nine lines of this speech in Q2 and F are reduced to just three in Q1. What emerges from a parallel study of the first section of this soliloquy is the direction and scope of Hamlet's annihilating focus, which in Q2 and F is directed inward, whereas Q1 seeks a type of communal destruction, something more apocalyptic. Meaningful differences also emerge through the prosody of the texts, perhaps revealing a more ambivalent Q2 and F Hamlet.

The soliloquy begins following the departure of the king's court, leaving Hamlet

alone for the first time in the play:

O that this too too sallied flesh would melt (Q2, 1.2.129)

O that this too much grieved and sallied flesh
Would melt to nothing (Q1, 2.55-6)[8]

O that this too too solid flesh would melt (F, 1.2.127)

The differences here are significant to the meaning of Hamlet's desire for self-destruction and

the culture to which they may belong. Editors have disagreed over the use of 'sallied' and

'solid': J. Dover Wilson suggested that the former was the result of a misprint and should

read 'sullied', a position that some editors have followed, while many more have fiercely

opposed it. The various meanings of these terms may be understood as follows: 'sallied',

attacked; 'solid', firm and stable; 'sullied', defiled. In performance the word operates

homophonically, allowing all meanings to merge in the ear of the audience. [9,10]

The solid, defiled and besieged flesh is an expression of its inferiority to the soul. This

dualism may recall Plato's *Phaedo* (referred to previously) in which Plato writes, 'the soul of

the philosopher utterly disdains the body and flees from it, seeking rather to come to be alone

by itself'.[11] It may also relate to the Neoplatonic hierarchy in which the physical world is the

lowest manifestation of spiritual cosmology. But Hamlet's desire goes beyond an abhorrence

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[8] Q1 is divided into 17 scenes.

[9] G.R. Hibbard's rejection of J. Dover Wilson's preference for 'sullied' is briefly presented in four parts: the veracity of F; the possible contamination of Q2 by Q1; the misguided assumption that 'solid flesh' may have elicited comical undertones; and, most compelling, the dismantling of Wilson's notion that Hamlet is speaking of melting snow: 'as anyone who has watched snow melting knows, when the snow goes the dirt remains'. See William Shakespeare and, *Hamlet*, ed. by G. R. Hibbard Oxford World's Classics (Oxford [England]; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 383.

[10] Fredson Bower's 1956 essay on this debate remains useful. See, F. Bowers, 'Hamlet's "Sullied" or "Solid" Flesh: A Bibliographical Case–History.', ed. by A Nicholl, *Shakespeare Survey*, 9 (1956), 44–48.

[11] Plato, *Phaedo*, ed. by David Gallop, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 65.

of the flesh and a desire for its dissolution; it does not aim at melting and thawing, but at

resolving. It is a destruction that will lead to a reconstitution in the form of a dew drop, a

significant literary symbol for the soul.

The sallied/sullied/solid adjective suggests the reasons for this desire – because of

life's Jobean hardships, because of the sins of the flesh and because the flesh, in its solidity,

acts as a barrier or prison to the soul's blissful return to heaven. In the first chapter's account

of *cupio dissolvi*, this tripartite of the flesh was found across scripture, poetry and sermons of

the early modern period, which is to say that sallied, sullied and solid each offer a bridge

back to *cupio dissolvi*. Starting with the Folio's use of 'solid', we may observe that it conveys

an image of the body's solidity, as a confining and limiting space in which the soul is

trapped. In this way, of the three terms, 'solid' most readily comports with the metaphorical

language of *cupio dissolvi,* as outlined above. But does Hamlet's desire for liquefaction relate

to a desire for God? Hibbard observes 'the whole process of solid becoming liquid, becoming

vapour seems to have interested Shakespeare'.[12] This is a similar observation to that made by

Kristen Poole, who asks:

> Why are early modern authors, Shakespeare included, so fascinated with melting and
> dissolving? […] Do the frequent references to melting and dissolving signal not
> fascination, but its opposite, the familiarity of this habit of thought? [13]

By extending the dissolution process to vapour, Hibbard reveals two entirely different

outcomes for the soul: in the first instance, the dissolved soul is obliterated, in the second, the

dissolved soul becomes vapour and thus extends the metaphor to resurrection. There is no

evidence of vapour in this passage, but Shakespeare's use of 'dew' represents the preceding

point of the process, and with such momentum that the imagination may conclude it.

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[12] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* ed. by G. R. Hibbard, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 383.

[13] Mary Floyd Wilson and Garrett Sullivan, *Geographies of Embodiment in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 153.

Other early modern examples attest more explicitly to the religious symbolism of 'dew'. In a ballad of 1552, we see the melding of 'worms', 'dew', 'melt', and 'clay' that Shakespeare experiments with throughout *Hamlet*: 'O meat for wormes, O dewe sone melted, O clotte of 82rittle claye.'[14] Here the 'dew' metaphor is contained within a larger narrative of decay, while Andrew Marvell's poem 'On a Drop of Dew' provides a good example of 'dew' and its anticipated ascension, as the end of a process of decay:

> How loose and easy hence to go,
> How girt and ready to ascend,
> Moving but on a point below,
> It all about does upwards bend.
> Such did the manna's sacred dew distil,
> White and entire, though congealed and chill,
> Congealed on earth: but does, dissolving, run
> Into the glories of th' almighty sun.[15]

The soul that Marvell describes is in the form of a dew drop, ready to ascend to heaven. Stanley Fish's analysis of this poem further unlocks the symbolism of the dew drop, first by explaining the meaning of its physical properties and then by revealing its biblical allusion to Exodus 16:11-24, when God provides the Israelites with manna that appears in the wake of the morning's risen dew 'small as the hoary frost upon the earth' (Exodus 16.14).[16] This particular biblical passage relates to Hamlet's formula for dissolution in two ways: first, as we have seen, by revealing 'dew' as a symbol of the soul's resurrection, or at least a conduit between the temporal and divine; and second, by introducing a frozen element, a 'hoar frost', that we may associate with Hamlet's desire to 'thaw'. It is a complicated set of allusions in which God's manna is delivered by the rising dew. Following this formulation, Shakespeare

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[14] T Thachame, *[An Exhortation to Despise the Gifts], Whych We Receaue by Faylynge Fortune.* (London, 1552).

[15] Andrew Marvell and Nigel Smith, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, Longman Annotated English Poets, Rev. ed (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 42.

[16] Dew also appears as a resurrection symbol in Isaiah: Thy dead men shall live, even with my body shall they rise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew *is* as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead (GEN. Isa. 26:19).

enters the process at a different point in its cycle: he wishes for the frosted manna to thaw into liquid dew and thus receive its divine ascension.

> The particular character or quality of Marvell's 'dew', according to Fish is its:

> refusal to be apprehended to anything but itself. That refusal takes the physical form of oscillation. […] the state of insecurity – of not being tied down to anything – is what the drop of dew desires, and restlessness does not name a deprivation but a triumph […] the purity of its self-definition remains uncompromised.[17]

Shakespeare's use of 'dew' and the metaphor to which it belongs is more ambiguous in its Christian allusions, but Fish's description may offer an explanation of Hamlet's desire for his flesh to 'melt / thaw, and resolve into a dew' (1.2.130). As dew, Hamlet is triumphantly free and self-defining. This is, perhaps, what Simon Palfrey is referring to when he describes Hamlet's desires for dissolution as 'not a simple dream of escape or lust never *quite* to be absorbed'. But, if Hamlet's yearning follows that of the eager dew drop, then Palfrey's contention that while Hamlet desires osmosis, the 'pervasive sense that he doesn't quite know into what' overlooks these biblical allusions.[18]

The use of 'sallied' (Q2) and 'sullied', following J. Dover Wilson, develops notions of suffering and sinfulness which echo the misery of Job, but also contain a misanthropy that is alluded to throughout the Bible. In James 4.4, for example, the adulterous (by which Hamlet may understand Gertrude) are chastised: 'know ye not that the amity of the world is the enmity of God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, maketh himself the enemy of God.' (James 4.4) The 'world' that James refers to is that of 'worldliness', 'love of the world and its pleasures (typically regarded as a fault or a sin)'.[19] Perhaps the use of either

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[17] Stanley Eugene Fish, *Versions of Antihumanism: Milton and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 216.

[18] Simon Palfrey, *Doing Shakespeare* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2005), p. 65.

[19] 'worldliness, n.' *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2022. Web. 7 October 2022.

of these terms, rather than 'solid', suggests an outwardly focused anger. Fernie explains that Hamlet 'loves goodness and virtue, and he loves his mother; he hates sin and depravity, and he hates it more in her.'[20] Here, Hamlet is the 'scourge and minister' not merely the self-flagellant (3.4.173). Christopher Tilmouth observes that 'Hamlet experiences his revulsion for corporeality not merely intellectually but also graphically.'[21] The process is explicit and detailed, like an alchemical recipe or perhaps an extended version of the hendiadys that Frank Kermode observes throughout the play.[22]

These first lines express a desire for his flesh to dissolve, but the invocation of suicide is a separate thought, introduced in the soliloquy's third and fourth lines 'Or that the Everlasting had not fixed / His canon 'gainst self-slaughter' (1.2.132). This separation of thought, which pivots on 'or', reveals Hamlet's *cupio dissolvi* as independent from what he calls 'self-slaughter'. Moreover, *cupio dissolvi* and suicide, represent an opposition between the supremacy of nature (or perhaps divinity) and the agency of humanity; melting, thawing and resolving is imagined as an unmanageable natural process, in contrast to the human-directed process of suicide. The agency invoked through suicide, however, constrained by Canon law, is limited to the confines of Hamlet's mind. The distinction between *cupio* and suicide reveals how Hamlet's thoughts move from a desire to dissolve and rise to heaven like a dew drop, to the method that would deliver that death, if only God's law allowed it.

Q1 provides an alternative second thought to this soliloquy, without implying suicide but equally illuminating as an article of *cupio dissolvi*. Hamlet directs his nihilism outwards, in a sweeping imprecation for the world's destruction, 'or that the universal / Globe of heaven would turn all to a chaos!' (Q1, 2.56-7). Lorne Buchman's thoughts on *Othello's* chaos are

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[20] Ewan Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), p. 129.
[21] Christopher Tilmouth, *Passion's Triumph over Reason: A History of the Moral Imagination from Spenser to Rochester*, 1. publ. in paperback (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 100.
[22] Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, 3. [print.] (London: Penguin Books, 2001), p. 101.

pertinent to this moment in Q1 *Hamlet.* Buchman asserts that 'Othello's reference to 'chaos'

obviously foreshadows the disintegration of his being. Chaos is time with neither order nor

coherence'.[23] This formulation operates in Hamlet's desire for annihilation, the Classical

notion that 'Earth and Heaven, Gaia and Uranos, are born from out of Chaos, the primordial

undifferentiated abyss'.[24] The desire for destruction in Q1 and Q2 bifurcate along this branch

of images: Q2 is a desired destruction that offers a method and, I believe, implies a divine

destination. Q1 does not offer the agency (albeit limited) of Q2 and its objective is without

the hope of a resurrection. Indeed, by returning the world to chaos, Hamlet's vision of

destruction is so complete as to dismantle time itself.

The hyperbole of Q1 has reached its plausible limits and abruptly turns to Gertrude's

recent marriage to the King. Q2, however, develops Hamlet's *contemptus mundi* [contempt of

the world]:

> How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable
> Seem to me all the uses of this world!
>
> (1.2.133-4)

Michael D. Bristol suggests that 'uses' relates to the 'customs, along with manners, habits

and fashions, the "ways" of this world' and that custom for Hamlet 'seems to be a kind of

ethical laziness'.[25] This is a rewarding observation when we understand canon law as a 'use'

- a custom, manner, habit and fashion. It is an important pairing, offering real insight into

Hamlet's ambivalence: acknowledging the authority of canon law, specifically the edict of

the sixth commandment, but then framing this statute as a custom which has rolled-on

through the centuries, unchallenged.[26] Another way to understand Hamlet's response to ritual

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[23] Lorne Buchman, 'Orson Welles's "Othello": A Study of Time in Shakespeare's Tragedy', *Shakespeare Survey*, 39 (2002), p. 60.

[24] Bron Raymond Taylor and others, *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (New York: Continuum, 2008), p. 433.

[25] Michael D. Bristol, 'The Customary and the Ethical: Understanding Hamlet's Bad Habits', ed. by Zimmerman and Garrett Sullivan, *Shakespeare Studies*, 40 (2012), pp. 72–73.

[26] Matthew 5:21.

is posited by Andy Mousley, 'ritual, as far as Hamlet is concerned, has lost its eloquence, its meaning, its authenticity'.[27] So rather than lamenting the oppressive rituals and traditions of the church and state, Hamlet sees them dishonoured and degraded.

This first soliloquy addresses the three key issues related to this chapter's argument: latency of faith, a taxonomy of *cupio* and evidence of a dialectic between faith and reason. Through the dew drop metaphor, notions of a Christian resurrection are evoked in a formulation that otherwise appears secular. Two distinct versions of *cupio dissolvi* emerge; Q1, the type of annihilation that consumes everything; Q2 and F, an inverted desire for self-dissolution. And, finally, by reading Hamlet's frustration with 'the uses of this world' as an immediate response to his thoughts on canon law, we see the beginning of his challenge to Christian imperatives.

<center>

IV.   'Thinking makes it so'

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The following analysis is spread across a section of Act Two, Scene Two of *Hamlet*. The section is not found in the Q1 text and the differences between Q2 and F only become plain shortly following the arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. At this point, the analysis departs from the Q2 text to follow the development of the debate in the thirty additional lines of F. The section explores two conversations: the first, and very much the minor focus of this section of analysis, a brief exchange between Hamlet and Polonius; the second between Hamlet, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. These conversations reveal further evidence of the latency of faith in Hamlet's self-destructive desire, a finer qualification of *cupio* and the

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[27] Andy Mousley, *Re-Humanising Shakespeare: Literary Humanism, Wisdom and Modernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 23.

emerging dialectic of faith and reason. In this section, Shakespeare continues to develop the cycle of destructive renewal and signals to the audience that renewal is the objective, and destruction the method to bring it about. The synthesis of these themes is realised in Hamlet's scene with Polonius and, most notably, his departing remarks:

> POLONIUS: My lord, I will take my leave of you.
>
> HAMLET: You cannot take from me anything that I will
> Not more willingly part withal – except my life, except
> my life, except my life.
>
>   (2.2.209-12)

Two elements of this dialogue assist us in understanding the presentation of Hamlet's destructive desire: the use of the dash, which although an invention of modern editors is, nevertheless, indicative of Shakespeare's intention to emphasise the abrupt turn from comedy to tragedy. By using a dash, modern editors are highlighting a redirection of thought, from a quibbling taunt to perhaps a state of desperation. It is more revealing when we consider Shakespeare's use of the dash in the 'to be or not to be' soliloquy, 'To be, or not to be – that is the question' (3.1.55). This most famous dash appears identically in F and, although the general formulation is quite different, also in Q1.[28] It seems to express the way in which Hamlet's thoughts develop, especially those concerning his destruction.

The second element of this passage, pertinent to Hamlet's expression of his self-destructive ideation, is his repetition of the phrase 'except my life' (2.2.212). It is striking in its lack of sophistication. Derek Attridge describes the change in Hamlet's expressive style:

> Hamlet's richly varied language, full of rushes and sallies of rhythmically
> orchestrated phrasing, suddenly starts reiterating itself like a stuck needle as he

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[28] The dashes which precede 'except my life' and follow 'To be, or not to be' have been adopted in the Arden editions of Q1, Q2 and F: William Shakespeare, *Hamlet: The Texts of 1603 and 1623*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, The Arden Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury, 2008).

confronts his own death-wish (which Freud, we may remember, linked closely to the phenomenon of repetition-compulsion).[29]

Attridge's Freudian observation is well known to scholars of the play, but this aspect of Freud, the 'death wish', will make a useful contribution to the final chapter of this thesis through the work of Lacan's corresponding theory of death drive. In his observation of Hamlet's 'stuck needle' speech, the repetition presents an opportunity in performance to find three variant tonalities and inflexions. One version of many may be performed as follows: the first phrase remains coloured by the levity of Hamlet's mocking; the second, uncomplicated, to function like a fulcrum between the first and last; the final iteration, harnessing the rhythm of the verse to place emphasis on 'life' (2.2.12).

The scene continues in relay, Polonius being replaced by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the 'tedious old fool' for Hamlet's 'good lads' (2.2.214 - 220). There follows a brief, pleasant exchange before the first element of disagreement is introduced. Rosencrantz asserts that 'the world's grown honest', to which Hamlet responds, 'Then is doomsday near – but your news is not true' (2.2.234-5). Rosencrantz's judgement may suggest a satisfaction with the crowning of the new king. In response, Hamlet invokes doomsday, returning to the biblical frame of reference that informed his first soliloquy. Hibbard explains that Hamlet associates honesty with doomsday 'because nothing but the threat of doomsday could convert this world to honesty'.[30] Indeed, there may be a hint of eagerness in Hamlet's initial response, before its progress is checked: the world remains dishonest even in the reporting of that dishonesty.

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[29] Derek Attridge, *Moving Words: Forms of English Poetry*, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 44.
[30] Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* ed. Hibbard, p. 216.

At this point, Q2 abruptly returns to more cordial inquiries, while F develops the doomsday thought over an additional 30 lines, in which the notion of imprisonment grows from the thought of annihilation:

> HAMLET: Let me question more in particular. What have
>   you, my good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune
>   that she sends you to prison hither?
>
> GUILDENSTERN: Prison, my lord?
>
> HAMLET: Denmark's a prison.
>
> ROSENCRANTZ: Then is the world one.
>
>   (F, 2.2.237-67) [31]

There are a number of interesting observations to make of this short dialogue. The first is that because Hamlet is a prince, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not able to disagree with him outright. Rosencrantz is able to ameliorate Hamlet's denigration of Denmark, but his effort to expose its error is quickly adopted by Hamlet as an amplification of his confinement. It is a structural ordering, composed of 'many confines, wards and dungeons – Denmark being one o'th' worst' (F, 2.2.244-5). This final insult allows positions to be more explicitly drawn:

> ROSENCRANTZ: We *think* not so, my lord.
>
> HAMLET: Why, then, 'tis none to you; for there is nothing either good or bad, but *thinking* makes it so. To me it is a prison.
>
>   (F, 2.2.248-9, my emphasis)

This suggests that Hamlet's prison – and even his flesh – are not material entities, but the products of his thoughts, expressions of his conflicted subjectivity. The notion that is being

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[31] Following the quoted material from F and Q1 above, I have adopted the Arden editions of these texts. Facsimile editions of F do not use dashes in the scenes that I discussed in 2.2 and 3.1 and with this passage, F, 2.2.237-67, a colon follows the word 'particular'. For simplicity and clarity, I use the Arden editions and adopt their punctuation.

suggested here is profound and provocative: there is no absolute or inherent good and bad, but rather the product of an individual's perception, bias and judgement. Here we see the celebrated humanist Hamlet, alerting us to 'the world-altering power of the mind [its] capaciousness, of its ability to fashion its own truth and its own good and to escape earthly constraints'.[32]

Thoughts and thinking form an important theme of the play and, they dart between heaven and earth like dew drops or angels. But the King's failed prayer in 3.3 reminds us that his thoughts are grounded by the weight of sin: 'My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. / Words without thoughts never to heaven go' (3.3.97-98). Hamlet's thoughts are also contaminated with worldliness and so there is no escape offered through the mind. His assertion that he could make the confines of a nutshell an 'infinite space' (F. 2.2.253), is swiftly shattered by the intrusion of hostile thoughts, dreams and ambitions. Whereas the soul interprets, articulates and longs for the divine, the mind is left to organise thoughts, so to speak, on the ground. They are, as John Curran posits, 'world-altering' but not eternity-altering, being formed through the evidence of materiality; as solid, sullied and sallied as the flesh. Thoughts are given a transformative power but also a boundary, which Hamlet reaches when he says, 'I cannot reason' (F. 2.2.263). He is not merely ceding the debate, but revealing the limitations of thought, which is forever imbued with temporality.

We start to see a hierarchy in the pattern of words, thoughts and actions and understand that Hamlet's self-destruction is a product of thought. It is limited to this state as it remains without action. It is the desire to dissolve, the *cupio dissolvi*, but not the act itself. The Player King's assertion that 'Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own'

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[32] John E. Curran, *Hamlet, Protestantism, and the Mourning of Contingency: Not to Be* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), p. 1.

(3.2.207) perhaps articulates the relationship between reason and faith for Hamlet: he is free to think about self-slaughter, and later murder, but God's will prohibits the action.

V.   'What a piece of work is a man!'

The celebrated Renaissance philosopher, Pico della Mirandola, wrote in his 1486 *Discourse on the Dignity of Man,* 'there was nothing to be seen more marvellous than man […] And that celebrated exclamation of Hermes Trismegistus, "What a great miracle is man"'.[33] Pico's treatise, often called the 'manifesto of the Renaissance', appears to be the starting point for Hamlet's short speech on man (which only appears in the Folio) as a masterpiece of divine creation:

> I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercise; and, indeed, it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory. This most excellent canopy the air, look you, this brave o'erhanging, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire – why it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action, how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a god! The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals – and yet to me what is this quintessence of dust? Man delights not me – no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling you seem to say so.
> (F. 2.2.294-309)

If this passage is a sincere celebration of man, then it might be considered a reiteration of Pico's great thesis of humanism, in which man has agency over thought and choice. In his book *Re-Humanising Shakespeare*, Andy Mousley offers useful insight into the parallels between Hamlet and Pico's philosophical positions and explains how choice, in Pico's view a central achievement of humanity, is bewildering for Hamlet. Mousley describes how Hamlet longs for the stability of past foundations, expressed through rituals, which have died along with his father. He describes Hamlet as spinning, 'disoriented, immobilised by choice and

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[33] Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. by Robert Caponigri (Chicago: Gateway, 1956), p. 3.

caught between divided dispositions' in the middle of variegated religious and philosophical currents.[34] Humanism, as celebrated by Pico, threatens to overwhelm Hamlet, who is already busily contending with a philosophical deluge. By the end of the play, Mousley concludes, Hamlet has settled his debate, opting for a world ordered by God. [35]

The speech does not restate his desire to dissolve, but it does develop the context from which this longing continues to emerge. The disorientation, dislocation, deceitfulness and fallibility of appearance that has characterised his uncle's court and its contrast to his father's. The destructive force of the speech takes man, as the image of God, and exposes his true baseness.[36] It is as if Shakespeare takes the freedoms offered by Pico, to question the authority of a philosophical position, and turns them in on themselves, the subjectivity of humanism challenging its own assumptions.

The speech begins with what Philip Edwards calls a performance of 'fashionable melancholy […] part of Hamlet's campaign to mislead Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and keep them off the true scent'. [37] But Hamlet's melancholy has been present from his first appearance, when the clouds of grief still hung on him, and he had not yet received the details of his father's murder. His melancholy is surely at least partially sincere.

Hamlet seems to detach himself from the causes of his melancholy, claiming 'wherefore I know not' (F, 2.2.295). It is perhaps in his foregoing 'all custom of exercises' that we can return to Hamlet's detachment from ritual. I earlier referenced Michael D. Bristol's assertion that 'all the uses of this world' refers to the 'customs, along with manners, habits and fashion' from which Hamlet has become dislocated. Here, Hamlet speaks of that separation as a contribution to or symptom of his melancholy.[38] Indeed, there is a broad

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[34] Mousley, p. 42.
[35] Ibid., p. 42.
[36] 'Thus God created the man in his image: in the image of God created he him' (Genesis 1:27).
[37] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (Updated Edition)*, ed. by Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 142.
[38] Bristol, pp. 72–73.

critical perception of Hamlet's return to Elsinore from Wittenberg as that of a philosophical herald, delivering new Protestant doctrines to Elsinore. But perhaps Hamlet found in the customs of his father's court, a martial and perhaps more Catholic culture, a control against which he could explore and test new ideas. Perhaps, also, our simplification of the Wittenberg court denies the Lutheran code of Christian humanism, which remains subservient to faith in that Luther limited intellectual freedoms to the temporal realm.

Mousley posits that 'Hamlet is a conspicuous example of a character standing outside traditions, habits, rituals and supposedly natural human impulses'.[39] Following his father's death and his uncle's usurpation, which dismantled ritual and custom, Hamlet is a cynical voyeur, cast adrift and longing for old certainties. This position poses the following questions: first, what were the 'old certainties' of the court? Second, how are they suggested in the text? And third, from where are they derived? The Ghost serves as messenger here, providing at least a hint of the imperatives of his former court, which may be broadly described as martial in character and Catholic in faith. He appears in Act One, Scene four in 'complete steel', suggesting his role as a warrior king (1.4.52). He recounts the purgatorial fires that he must endure until his sins are 'burnt and purged away' (1.5.14). His murder, 'by a brother's hand', (1.5.74) and remarriage combine the biblical 'fall' and Cain's murder of his brother Abel. Claudius becomes an 'incestuous […] adulterate beast' (1.5.42). It is a litany of sin: adultery, incest and murder.[40] Hamlet's father has been cheated of his life and afterlife, killed without the opportunity to repent his sins:

> Unhouseled , disappointed, unaneled,
> No reckoning made but sent to my account
> With all my imperfections on my head.
>
> (1.5.74-9)

The Ghost inspires in Hamlet an Old Testament spirit of vengeance:

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[39] Mousley, p. 33.
[40] 'Thou shalt not discover the shame of thy brother's wife: *for* it is thy brother's shame' (Lev. 18:16).

> Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot,
> Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.
>
> (Exodus 21:24-5)

He commands Hamlet to 'bear it not' (1.5.81).

In the final part of the exchange between Hamlet and the Ghost, thoughts turn to

memory. The Ghost instructs Hamlet to 'remember me', to which Hamlet replies, 'Ay, thou

poor ghost, while memory holds a seat / In this distracted globe' (1.5.91-7). The surface

meaning of Hamlet's reply is the simple metaphor of his mind as a 'distracted globe', but this

image serves a double function, speaking of the dissolution of old certainties, rituals, customs

and habits in the new Claudian Elsinore, a world or globe distracted from itself. Over the

remaining course of the passage, Hamlet returns to develop the notion of human subjectivity,

creating a pattern of hyperbolic praise before denigrating it:

> The earth *seems* to *me* a sterile promontory, this most excellent canopy the air, look
> you, this brave o'erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire,
> why it *appeareth* nothing to *me* but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.
>
> (2.2.264-9, my emphasis)

The earth and the heavens have been carefully selected for insult. They represent a lost

immutability and return Hamlet to a self-dismantling chaos, without the compass and clock of

the stars, which now merely *seem* or *appear,* as a subjective entity. Ronald Dworkin explains:

> the dominant Western religious traditions insist that God made humankind 'in His
> own image,' that each individual human being is a representation and not merely a
> product of a divine creator and people who accept that article of faith will
> understandably think that each human being, not just the species as a whole, is a
> creative masterpiece.[41]

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[41] Ronald Dworkin, 'The Idea of the Sacred', in *Applied Ethics: Ethical Issues in Medicine, Technology and Life Sciences, Part II*, ed. by Doris Schroeder and Ruth F. Chadwick (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 363.

Dworkin's description follows a humanist view that humankind has God-like powers of self-determination. 'God-*like'* is perhaps the point of it for Hamlet. The human is '*like* an angel […] *like* a god' (2.2.272, my emphasis).

Shakespeare's description of humanity as a masterpiece is the adoption of an attitude to humanity's vaunted place in the universe. But Hamlet establishes this humanist trope to highlight the vanity of such a position. This returns us to the idea, central to an understanding of the notion of *cupio dissolvi*, that worldliness is dangerous and mortal achievements are futile. In this way, Shakespeare's presentation of the vainglorious human parallels with other texts concerned with the ideas related to *cupio dissolvi*. The theme is later explored in the Jesuit text *Typus Mundi* (1627) and reproduced in Francis Quarles's *Emblemes, divine and moral* (1634). The contradictions that seem to inhabit Hamlet's view of 'man as masterpiece' are present in the *Sic Decipit Orbis* emblem, and each aspect of the emblem seems to amplify this:

Figure 9. Sic decipit orbis, Emblemes by Francis Quarles, 1643

The image depicts an angel-like figure observing an improved version of himself - taller, broader, with larger wings. The message is *Sic decipit orbis* [thus deceives the world]. The epigram offers robust advice to the reader:

> Be not deceiv'd, great fool: there is no loss
> In being small; great bulks but swell with dross.
> Man is heav'n's masterpiece: if it appear
> More great, the value's less: if less, more dear.[42]

Like Hamlet's cynical celebration of man, this seems to be an attack on appearance over substance. Hamlet's concern with the duplicity of appearance is a persistent theme that resurfaces explicitly in his advice to the players in Act Three, Scene Two:

> For anything so o'erdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.
>
> (3.2.21-7)

The players must 'o'erstep not the modesty of nature' (3.2.19), they must not perform as Quarles's convex globe to feed the arrogance of man, but rather expose his essential truth, that of corporeal fallibility.

Quarles's emblems, which formed such an important part of the earlier analysis of the *cupio dissolvi* phrase, have a habit of self-contradiction. Rather than a flattering reflection or even a reproach, the orb reveals what humanity, with the grace of God, may become. The masterpiece that Hamlet describes is the promise of heaven, which becomes clear in the speech's conclusion, that man is merely a 'quintessence of dust'. Thompson and Taylor's gloss is helpful in recalling the meaning of quintessence as the '"fifth essence", the substance

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[42] Quarles, p. 87.

of which heavenly bodies were thought to be composed, and which, according to alchemy, could be extracted from earthly elements by the process of distillation'.[43] The phrase is a construction of oxymoronic humanity, of the extraordinary coexistence of heaven and earth. Juliet McLauchlan sums up the power of this paradox:

> 'Quintessence' first creates the expectation of the distillation of something rare and fine, following on from the high human potential which Hamlet has been outlining. Then comes the terrible deflating effect of the monosyllables, 'of dust' - with all the connotations of mortality, decomposition, and utter worthlessness carried by the word 'dust'.[44]

We should read beyond the solely negative connotations that Juliet McLauchlan posits for 'dust', connotations that are rooted in a secular paradigm in which life is *all* and death is *nothing*. Dust for Hamlet becomes a necessary, even celebrated, step in the progress of the soul's return to heaven. It is, in an alchemical sense, the 'drossy' proof of purification. His description of man as masterpiece is not a humanist celebration of agency and self-fashioning, but rather a version of the *Sic decipit orbis*. It serves as a reminder, perhaps to himself as much as anyone else, of man's inherent weakness. The masterpiece becomes a *process* of prudence and virtue, rather than an outcome. Artur Mamcarz-Plisiecki explains how the course of man's divine aspiration, through the notion of man as masterpiece, was understood by twentieth-century philosophers Mortimer Adler and Jacques Maritain:

> Maritain and Adler were, at the very least, implying that being a masterpiece means moving toward some highest personal good (God) through our own, personal decisions and actions, our own motion […] We can reasonably understand the natural inclination, call, to become a masterpiece: (1) we will always be dealing with an upward movement; and (2), this upward movement will essentially consist in a rush toward spiritual flowering, toward the qualitative fullness, perfection of life, holiness, and God.[45]

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[43] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Thompson and Taylor, p. 257.
[44] Juliet McLauchlan, 'The Prince of Denmark and Claudius's Court', in *Shakespeare Survey* (1974), p. 51.
[45] Peter A. Redpath and others, Imelda Chłodna, and Artur Mamcarz-Plisiecki, ed., *The Great Ideas of Religion and Freedom: A Semiotic Reinterpretation of the Great Ideas Movement for the 21st Century*, Volume 369 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), p. 63.

The paradox of divinity and dust, in other words, of soul and flesh, recalls the Pauline

dualism that provides the impetus to *cupio dissolvi*. Hamlet observes and despises man's

delusion of grandeur, lurid in the Claudian court. The masterpiece motif is an aspiration, as

Maritain and Adler suggest, 'an upward movement' which becomes only fully realised in

man's return to God, the dissolution of the flesh and freeing of the soul, the unravelling of the

paradox.

<div align="center">VI. 'To be, or not to be'</div>

In the 'solid flesh' soliloquy, *cupio dissolvi* appeared through shared images of dissolution

and resurrection: in Hamlet's wish to 'melt / thaw, and resolve itself into a dew'(1.2.130)

and in his assertion that 'Denmark's a prison' (F, 2.2.66), by which I explored the notion of

the confinement and pollution of the mind. In my analysis of 'man as masterpiece' (F.

2.2.294-5), I explored Hamlet's rejection of worldliness and suggested that the masterpiece

motif casts an eye to heaven.

  In the 'To be, or not to be' speech I offer further evidence of a relationship with the

theme of *cupio* by attending to the specific elements of Christian allusion that relate to *cupio*

dissolvi: dissolution (and, perhaps more broadly, self-destruction); the weakness, suffering

and confinement of the flesh; and resurrection.

  As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, I would also like to broaden my

perspective on the biblical source of *cupio*, albeit marginally, by working with the preceding

line of Philippians; 'And whether to live in the flesh *were* profitable for me, and what to

choose I know not' (Phil. 1:22). In this section, I reveal the following: first, that this speech is

shaped by Hamlet's religious ideas; and second, that by reading this speech against

Philippians 1:22, and with an understanding of how Hamlet's other key speeches and

dialogue relate to Philippians 1:23, a sense of Hamlet's complex negotiation between desire, choice and faith is vividly revealed.

For some, such as the literary critic Walter King, the choices that Hamlet is attempting to negotiate are philosophical, not theological. Indeed, King argues that had Shakespeare directed Hamlet's thoughts that way, towards faith:

> he would have lost control of the characterization of Hamlet already established, lost hold of Hamlet's compulsive search for meaning, the very nature of which demands that Hamlet exert his own mind and will and make the choice for life on his own, unsupported by any Christian conceptualizations.[46]

King seems to suggest that Shakespeare was able to untether Hamlet from his faith and by this Hamlet's search for meaning is somehow enhanced. I see no evidence for a faithless Hamlet; Christianity is abundant and explicit in his language and the shaping of his ideas throughout the play. And rather than Shakespeare losing control of Hamlet's characterisation, his complex and paradoxical representation of Hamlet's negotiation of faith with the humanist ideals of free choice creates intriguing sites of personal conflict. King's argument does, however, alert us to the notion of choice being a central concern of the soliloquy's meaning, although never free from theology. It is an ongoing dialectic, which begins, 'To be, or not to be – that is the question' (3.1.55).

Eric Mallin suggests that Hamlet opportunistically abandons himself to someone else's plot: 'effectively Claudius's, supposedly God's, but really Hamlet's'.[47] He accuses Hamlet of 'bullshitting his way into the God zone' to give his '*de facto suicide*' authority and consent. If Hamlet's submission to God's provenance is phony, as Mallin suggests, it is not Godless.

Thompson and Taylor suggest three dominant critical responses to Hamlet's opening line: '(a) whether life in general is worth living, (b) whether he should take his own life, (c)

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[46] Walter N. King, *Hamlet's Search for Meaning* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), p. 76.

[47] Eric Scott Mallin, *Godless Shakespeare*, Shakespeare Now! (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 61.

whether he should act against the king.'[48] Douglas Bruster, on the other hand, divides the line into many parts, treating Hamlet's thought as a mathematical puzzle and suggesting numerous possible solutions. What emerges from his complicated analysis is the inherent paradox of Hamlet's thinking. While Bruster's solutions for Hamlet broadly group into action or forbearance, both seem to lead towards disaster. If we see the line as a puzzle to be solved, as is the perfectly reasonable response, rather than an expression of ambiguity, we miss the point. There is no single 'answer' but rather a series of choices for Hamlet to consider. The articulation of these choices is radical in its defiance of orthodoxy and humanistic in its vision of self-fashioning. But the choice is an illusion: Hamlet is caught between patriarchal imperatives. What may appear as Stoicism is an obedience to canon law, and what seems to be an urge for revenge is the imperative of a dead father:

> GHOST
> If thou didst ever thy dear father love –
>
> HAMLET
> Oh God!
>
> GHOST
> Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!
>
> (1.5.23-25)

These choices are in fact a series of false dichotomies, merely different pathways towards the same conclusion. Fernie uses Hamlet's 'sea of troubles' metaphor to expose this point, that to 'end them' is to drown in them. Revenge and suicide become the same thing. Fernie explains that Hamlet is not afraid of death in a corporeal sense, but that murder, of king or self, would lead to 'a psychological or spiritual death, would be to drown the soul in the deed, would be absolutely not to be'.[49] Hamlet's opening line, then, might be understood as 'To be, or not to be, or *absolutely* not to be'. It prompts us to read a greater stress on *not* being - as it now

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[48] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. Thompson and Taylor, p. 284.
[49] Fernie, *Shame in Shakespeare*, p. 126.

might be understood to occupy two thirds of the line's meaning. Perhaps what Fernie is suggesting is that there can be no spiritual afterlife if Hamlet damns himself with the sin of murder (or self-murder).

Martin Dodsworth's explanation, that 'what Hamlet wants is oblivion, a sleep without dreams', initially seems to contradict Fernie's position.[50] How may Hamlet fear annihilation and yet desire oblivion? The answer, perhaps, lies in paradox and ambivalence. Here John Schwindt's paper, 'Luther's Paradoxes and Shakespeare's God', is useful. He describes Luther's theology as a type of anti-rationalism, in which the Christian is confronted with all manner of miracles which cannot be satisfied by reasoning. Schwindt argues that the faithful, according to Luther, should adopt the paradox that the more inscrutable that God becomes, the greater is the need to embrace a Christianity of blind faith.[51] There is evidence of this in *Hamlet*, for example, at the end of Hamlet's debate with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in which he concludes 'I cannot reason' (F, 2.2.263). This is partly an expression of his weariness with the debate and his disappointment with his friends, but it also speaks of his thoughts arriving at the boundary of a riddle.

Understanding Hamlet's relationship to reason and faith is complicated. At a stroke, many scholars and theatre directors have reduced Wittenberg to the epicentre of humanism and cast Hamlet as its poster boy. But what is the humanism that Wittenberg and Hamlet represent? For some, the term connotes a rejection of faith, that humanism is the 'new way' of thinking and Christianity the 'old'. But Robert Rosin provides an outline of three distinct periods of humanism: Renaissance-Reformation; a nineteenth-century version, which celebrated the 'upward trajectory for humankind'; and the 'progressive humanism' of the

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[50] Martin Dodsworth, *Hamlet Closely Observed* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 125.
[51] John Schwindt, 'Luther's Paradoxes and Shakespeare's God: The Emergence of the Absurd in Sixteenth-Century Literature', *Modern Language Studies*, 15.4 (1985), 4.

twentieth century, 'coupling an anthropomorphic focus with an intentional rejection of religion'.[52] Rosin goes on to say:

> The Renaissance devotees of the *studia humanitatis* certainly focused on human potential, but they sought no divorce from God. They did not jettison Christianity for some wider universalism.[53]

Rosin's explanation serves as a caution against reading Hamlet's humanism as an espousal of faithless reason. On the contrary, Hamlet's failed attempts to apply reason to the puzzle of the Claudian court propels him towards its rejection. At the heart of this is the rejection of the flesh. Reason, however elevated, is not beyond the reach and pollution of sin. Chris Hassel reminds us of Luther's view that: 'the rebelliousness of the flesh […] resists the law of your mind and the will of your spirit'.[54]

Reason, like the *Sic decipit orbis* emblem, is a vanity and an illusion, falsely presenting multivalence as an essential truth. This is illustrated in the application of reason to the notion of mourning in the play; for Claudius, Hamlet's prolonged mourning is 'To reason most absurd, whose common theme/ Is death of fathers' (1.2.103). Hamlet's grief, Claudius seems to suggest, ignores the inexorable logic of death. Hamlet, on the other hand, sees grief as an expression of what makes us human. The brevity of his mother's mourning is, therefore, monstrous. He suggests that 'a beast that wants discourse of reason would have mourned longer' (1.2.150-1). Claudius and Hamlet apply reason to the act of mourning and arrive at different conclusions.

The 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy represents Hamlet's failed attempt to reason himself into action. It fails in two ways: first, all the options that Hamlet suggests,

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[52] Robert Rosin, 'Humanism, Luther, and the Wittenberg Reformation', in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, ed. by Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'Ubomir Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 94.
[53] Rosin, p. 94.
[54] R. Chris Hassel, 'Hamlet's "Too, Too Solid Flesh"', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 25.3 (1994), 609–22 (p. 613).

adumbrated by Bruster, lead to an annihilating outcome; second, reason, contrary to what Claudius may want to believe, shares the deep subjectivity of human emotions. There is no essential truth, nothing beyond the reaches of thinking making it so, except in the divine, which occupies a space beyond the temporal vagaries of reason and mutability.

This aligns to Luther's declaration, perhaps following Hebrews 11:1, that 'faith is the grounds of things which are hoped for, and the evidence of things which are not seen', and 'the impossibility of understanding makes room for the exercise of faith'.[55] In this way, Hamlet's failed reasoning becomes a source of apophatic faith and another expression of *cupio dissolvi*; this iteration, by aligning reason as a product of the flesh, desires reason's dissolution. The implications of this observation are as follows: from each failed attempt to reason, a spring of faith emerges, one which affirms an ineffable divinity. The 'To be, or not to be', when observed through this lens, becomes for Hamlet a type of devotional practice. Reason seems to recede altogether, replaced by a desire to seek out God's providence.

St Paul's attempts to know God's will are articulated along strikingly similar lines and form a greater part of the *cupio* thought, musing, in the preceding line, 'And whether to live in the flesh were profitable for me, and what to choose I know not.' (Phil.1:22). For both Hamlet and St Paul, these are fleeting expressions of an illusory human freedom in which neither is grappling with living or dying but searching for a hidden providence. St Paul describes himself as 'distressed between both' (Phil.1:23); to endure a life of the flesh or to fly towards his desire. This formula is alive, as we have seen, in the opposition between Hamlet's Stoic forbearance and the potential of his damnable actions. The point of divergence between Hamlet and St Paul is in their understanding of the afterlife. St Paul describes 'a building given of God, that is, an house not made with hands, but eternal in the

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[55] *Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Will*, trans. by J.I. Parker and O.R. Johnston (Michigan: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1959), p. 101.

heavens' (2 Cor. 5:1). For Hamlet, it is an 'undiscovered country', the borders of which have

been breached by death-like sleep and the Ghost's visitation (3.1.78). Indeed, biblical

accounts suggest that sleep itself functions as a type of purgatory, or at least a resting place in

which to pass time until the Day of Reckoning, after which, 'And many of them that sleep in

the dust of the earth, shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and perpetual

contempt' (Daniel 12:2).

For Hamlet, sleep is an element of the paradox of the speech itself: Death is sleep,

but also death is to sleep 'No more'. It is a refuge from corporeal suffering, an escape from

'The heartache and the thousand natural shocks / That flesh is heir to' (3.1.61-2). Rather than

faith acting to diminish Hamlet's 'compulsive search for meaning', as King asserts, we see

Hamlet contending with a complex negotiation of possibilities, all of which are shaped by the

language of faith.[56] The 'consummation / Devoutly to be wished' (3.1.62-3), echoes Jesus's

final words on the cross 'Consummatum est' (VUL, John 19:30), and Hamlet's reference to a

'sleep of death', a popular literary formulation that predates Shakespeare, may also be found

in Psalm 13 of the KJV, in which David describes his suffering and asks for God to reveal

Himself: 'Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of

death' (KJV, Ps.13:3). Could a 'sleep of death' offer a wholly different type of death?

Perhaps something more akin to Fernie's tripartite of being, not being and *absolutely* not

being? The subtle difference of this phrase in the Geneva Bible reinforces the idea of sleeping

in death: 'Behold, *and* hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes, that I sleep not in death'

(GEN, Ps. 13:3). The eschatological options for both the Psalmist David and Hamlet are as

follows: life, death or a sleep of death. Life holds an inherent hope of resurrection; death, and

a return to Christ; but a sleep *in* death or a sleep *of* death suggests a terrifying dislocation, to

be overlooked by God's grace. For Hamlet, this liminal space is a dream which suspends him

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[56] Walter N. King, p. 76.

between heaven and earth. The 'rub', then, is not his dreams per se, but the way that his dreams, like Claudius's thoughts, will tether him to temporality.

As I have discussed, Dodsworth sees Hamlet's after death dreaming as an inhibitor to his desired oblivion, but what if the oblivion that Hamlet seeks is framed by the dualism of Christian theology, the consequence being that Hamlet passionately desires to be removed from the temporal by seeking the oblivion of the flesh? As St Paul says of the body 'It is sown in dishonour, *and* is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, *and* is raised in power' (GEN, 1 Cor. 15:43). Rhodri Lewis develops an equally appealing (and reinforcing) argument on Hamlet's understanding of sleep, drawing from his speech in Act Four, that begins:

> What is a man
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed? A beast – no more.
>
> (4.4.33-5)

For Hamlet, sleeping, like feeding and fornicating, is an occupation of the flesh. Lewis posits that Hamlet 'opts to dismiss [human nature] as fatally compromised. Human beings must either be perfect or the embodiment of chaotic materiality. Infinity or dust.'[57] The binary that Lewis presents is perhaps more of a linked process, whereby infinity may be attained only when the flesh has been dissolved.

Hamlet's disappointment with humanity occupies the next eight lines in a Jobian tirade against the injustices of the world, all of which may be ended, Hamlet asserts, 'with a bare bodkin' (3.1.75). This is the most explicit reference in the speech to suicide, and even here there is just enough ambiguity to see Hamlet's bodkin plunging into the chest of Claudius. Either way, the dagger will deliver a 'quietus'. Most modern editors have glossed 'quietus' as a legal term referring to the acquittal of debt, but the debt here is the same figurative application as that found in Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, 'Give us this day our

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[57] Rhodri Lewis, *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), p. 260.

daily bread. / And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors' (GEN, Matthew 6:11-12). The meaning becomes apparent through the Tyndale Bible, published in 1526, which uses 'trespasses' and 'trespass', becoming the favoured version of the Church of England. Tyndale translated 'trespass' from the Greek word *ophelilema*, which, according to James Strong, means '*something owed* i.e. (figuratively) a due; morally, a fault: debt'.[58] Ophelia's name operates as a cognate, which 'calls to mind debts, sins, offenses needing forgiveness…and revenge, for what is revenge, but a canceling [sic] of debt'. [59] Another element of the etymology of qietus is its housing of 'quiet'. James Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin show the word's association with tranquillity, rest, sleep and death. More interestingly, they show how the two ideas - debt and silence - function together in 'quietus':

> Hamlet's suicidal meditation, equating the dagger with a pen and writing "paid" to a debt (thereby discharging one's earthly duties and anxieties) dissolves, by the play's end, into the *quietus* or calm quietude of silent, timeless eternity, where no words can describe death's mystery - where, in fact, no words are needed (or meaningful), for the human soul has transcended time.[60]

As we have seen, Hamlet's choice, which resembles the choice that St Paul seems to suggest, that of being or not being, is a false opposition. Hamlet's fear of death, imagined as 'The undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns' (3.1.80-81) presents a faithlessness, allowing inattentive readers of the play to erroneously develop a view of a secular or at least agnostic Hamlet. I would suggest that a more fruitful interpretation is that Hamlet's fear provides a vehicle by which Shakespeare is able, throughout the course of the play, to silence these doubts in a providential quietus.

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[58] James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Updated and expanded ed (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 2021), p. 1655.

[59] Marguerite A. Tassi, *Women and Revenge in Shakespeare: Gender, Genre and Ethics* (Selingrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2011), p. 78.

[60] James Baumlin and Tita French Baumlin, 'Chronos, Kairos, Aion: Failures of Decorum, Right-Timing, and Revenge in Shakespeare's Hamlet', in *Rhetoric and Kairos: Essays in History, Theory and Praxis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 181.

VII.		'A beast – no more'

Hamlet's final soliloquy, which appears only in Q2, draws together some of the concerns of previous soliloquies Hamlet's delayed revenge, the god-like faculties of man, and notions of time, both temporal and divine:

> How all occasions do inform against me
> And spur my dull revenge. What is a man
> If his chief good and market of his time
> Be but to sleep and feed? A beast – no more.
> Sure he that made us with such large discourse,
> Looking before and after, gave us not
> That capability and godlike reason
> To fust in us unused. Now whether it be
> Bestial oblivion or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on th'event
> (A thought which quartered hath but one part wisdom
> And ever three parts coward) I do not know
> Why yet I live to say this thing's to do,
> Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
> To do't. Examples gross as earth exhort me –
> Witness this army of such mass and charge,
> Led by a delicate and tender prince
> Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed
> Makes mouths at the invisible event
> Exposing what is mortal and unsure
> To all that fortune, death and danger dare
> Even for an eggshell. Rightly to be great
> Is not to stir without great argument
> But greatly to find quarrel in a straw
> When honour's at the stake. How stand I then
> That have a father killed, a mother stained,
> Excitements of my reason and my blood,
> And let all sleep; while to my shame I see
> The imminent death of twenty thousand men
> That for a fantasy and trick of fame
> Go to their graves like beds, fight for a plot
> Whereon the numbers cannot try the cause,
> Which is not tomb enough and continent
> To hide the slain? O, from this time forth
> My thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth.
>   (4.4.31-65)

About the play's view of time, Barbara Everett asserts that it 'leads us unusually often to think of it in terms of the laws of time, and to call *Hamlet*, if we wish, a Time Play.'[61] Alerted to this focus, we can see that time is indeed a central concern: Gertrude's marriage is 'hasty' (2.2.57), the Ghost is 'Doomed for a certain term to walk the night' (1.5.10-11), Hamlet's mourning is too long, his mother's too brief, and so on. As well as time bearing down on Hamlet, and in its passing exposing him to accusations of procrastination, it is also said to be 'out of joint' (1.5.186). The natural order, perhaps the Divine order, has been meddled with by the Claudian court's nefarious behaviour. This speech serves as a further rejection of rationalism. It maps the imperfection and vanity of a belief in man's godlikeness and forms part of Hamlet's release into a paradigm of faith.

Shakespeare constructs this speech within the politico-religious linguistic framework of early modern England. Hamlet's feelings of shameful cowardice, as he may perceive his procrastination, are informants against him. Thoughts, like enemies of the state, are 'quartered', and honour, like a heretic or baited bear, is tied to the stake. Hamlet seems to regard these constructions of the mind with at least suspicion, if not contempt. It is an articulation of a frustration with the paradox of humanity, that within a bestial frame inheres a flicker of divinity. Hamlet is unsure which part to blame for his delay – overthinking reason or bestial ignorance and, in his confusion, both are tainted. He seems to conclude that humanity is valueless if it merely occupies itself in animalistic pursuits, namely, to sleep and feed. The ability to recall the past and anticipate the future, to apprehend it, he seems to suggest, is what elevates man to what he calls 'godlike reason' (4.4.37). This might have been a clear advocation for a rational, humanist approach, but surely if Hamlet's reason concludes that murder or self-murder is the solution, then it has merely returned him to yet

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[61] Barbara Everett, '"Hamlet": A Time to Die', in *Shakespeare Survey* (1977), pp. 117–24 (p. 117).

another beastly occupation. Hamlet presents the paradox, unsure whether to blame the beast

or the brain:

> Now whether it be
> Bestial oblivion or some craven scruple
> Of thinking too precisely on th'event
> […] I do not know
> Why yet I live to say this thing's to do.

(4.4.38-43)

The general thrust of this passage is a rebuke against Hamlet's perceived procrastination, for

which he suggests two possible causes: 'bestial oblivion' or 'thinking too precisely'. Like the

myriad pathways of the 'To be, or not to be' speech, which all lead to the same conclusion,

Hamlet's causes appear as opposites, but both relate to the paucity and abundance of thought

and reason. Hamlet's mission is to translate (or perhaps expose) thought into solid action. As

David Gurnham puts it, 'Hamlet wants his hot-blooded rage to overcome his reasoned

awareness of the wrongness of premeditated killing'.[62]

This process of grounding the abstract is one that he engages with throughout the

soliloquy. In the following lines, 'A thought which quartered hath but one part wisdom / And

ever three parts coward' (4.4.41-2), he reifies thought, making it a thing of flesh that may be

opened up to expose its cowardly entrails. This metaphor seems to reveal an aggressive

contempt for thought and suggests a hidden interiority in which moral infirmity may reside;

the thought seems to harbour traitors to action. Reason appears not as a positively

differentiating element of humanness, but as a great conceit. It is a perspective that recalls

Luther's famous assault on reason:

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[62] David Gurnham, *Memory, Imagination, Justice Intersections of Law and Literature* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), p. 49.

> Reason is the Devil's greatest whore; by nature of being she is a noxious whore; she is a prostitute, the Devil's appointed whore; whore eaten by scab and leprosy who ought to be trodden under foot and destroyed, she and her wisdom. [63]

Luther's account of reason, however, was more nuanced than this quotation may suggest. In his *Disputation Concerning Man* (1536), Luther argues that reason is 'the most important and the highest in rank among all things and, in comparison with other things of this life, the best and something divine'.[64] But the key here is, 'of this life'; Luther was keen to delineate the temporal scope of reason. Those who treated sacred matters with reason (and we must assume that in Reformation Europe sacred matters constitute a broad area) were using it to pursue and justify wickedness.

While Fortinbras' army marches into action (and death) Hamlet is, Luther might suggest, seduced by conflicted reasoning. Are we to assume that the Norwegian army has eschewed reason? They are led by a 'delicate and tender' (4.4.47) prince, perhaps not unlike Hamlet. Despite the apparent senselessness of their task, they '[make] mouths' at it. (4.4.49) But Fortinbras, Hamlet observes, is 'puffed' with 'divine ambition'. (4.4.48) He is prepared to expose 'what is moral and unsure / To all that fortune, death and danger dare/ Even for an eggshell.' (4.4.50-2) 'The imminent death of twenty thousand men' for the sake of honour would seem to be the definition of *un*reasonable (4.4.59). The futility of Fortinbras' campaign is built on the notion that honour exceeds human life. But is the restoration of his Father's honour an ambition of the divine? God's fifth commandment of the Decalogue 'Honor thy father and thy mother' may provide a scrap of justification, but surely not against the suggested scale of death, and not when set against the sixth commandment, 'Thou shalt not murder'.[65] It seems more likely that Fortinbras' divine ambition is an expression of his god-

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[63] 'Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments' (1525). *Luther's Works*. Vol. 40. Edited by Conrad Bergendoff. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), pp. 73-225.
[64] Martin Luther, *The Disputation Concerning Man* (1536) in Grant Kaplan, *Faith and Reason through Christian History: A Theological Essay* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), p. 120.
[65] Exodus. 20:12-13.

like role in deciding the fate of so many people. He is 'puffed' with notions of his divinity, his god complex. But the way in which he leads his soldiers to 'Go to their graves like beds' recalls Holbein's *The Dance of Death,* casting Fortinbras as the figure of Death.

By their compliance, the soldiers of the Norwegian army are demonstrating their faith in *an* afterlife, whether reputation or resurrection. Their sacrifice becomes a symbol of life's expendability and a further caution against seeing man as a masterpiece; they become votive offerings to the notion that man is merely dust.

VIII.   Painted Clay

The Gravedigger scene, Act Five, Scene One, functions as the penultimate chapter of Hamlet's thesis on the wretchedness of the flesh, building on the rejection of man as masterpiece and Hamlet's Lutheran caution on the scope and value of reason. It reveals a close connection to the concerns of *cupio dissolvi.* It exhumes the decayed corporeality of man, exposing the buried truth of dissolution: Man is revealed as a thing of clay. In this section, I explore the symbolic value of the disinterred remains and suggest that, rather than a simple *memento mori,* the severed body parts reveal the essential weakness of man and the delusion of his conceit. In the body's return to clay, it is dispossessed of worldly status, reasoning and authority.

For Hamlet, the essential revelation, and one that enables him to finally relinquish worldly power, is that rather than a masterpiece of creation the body is revealed to be a shattered vessel of clay. It perhaps follows the Lutheran thought that seemed to operate in Hamlet's exploration of reason, and recalls Luther's position on free will:

> But in the things pertaining unto God, which are above us and not put under us, man has no free-will at all. But he is in reality as clay in the hand of the potter. He is

placed under the mere power of God, passively and not actively. In this our real position we choose nothing, we do nothing. On the contrary we are chosen, we are prepared, we are regenerated.[66]

Luther's declaration of man's powerlessness is not quite as sweeping as it may first appear. Man's freewill may operate unconditionally against all those things below him: 'the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of heaven, and of the beasts of the field' (Ez. 38:20). But like reason, man must identify the boundary of freewill and avoid all that pertains to God. The gravedigger performs the task of helping Hamlet to identify this boundary. The image of humanity as clay or dust, often derived from the Book of Genesis, was frequently employed by Shakespeare. In *Richard II*, for example, Mowbray explains that 'Men are but gilded loam or painted clay' (1.1.179); in *1 Henry VI*, Edmund Mortimer speaks of his readiness for death 'Unable to support this lump of clay, / Swift-winged with desire to get a grave' (2.5.14-16); and in Sonnet 71, which begins 'No longer mourn for me when I am dead', the speaker informs the reader that he is:

> Fled
> From this vile world with vilest worms to dwell
> […]
> When I (perhaps) compounded am with clay,
> Do not so much as my poor name rehearse,
> But let your love even with my life decay
>
>   (Sonnet 71,1.3-10) [67]

The motif of man as clay, which is a fleeting image in these passages, becomes the foundational theme of the Gravedigger scene. I will, therefore, focus my attention on the expression of this motif through the Gravedigger's song and Hamlet's illustration of 'man as dust' in his allusion to Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar.

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[66] Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis, Vol. 1: Luther on Creation*, trans. by John Nicholas Lenker, Minneapolis (Lutherans in All Lands Co., 1904), p. 81.
[67] William Shakespeare, Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones, (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2007), p. 253.

Jan Blits describes the Gravedigger's song as 'a garbled, malaprop version' of Thomas Lord Vaux's lyric 'The Aged Lover Renounceth Love' from Tottel's *Songs and Sonettes*, first published in 1557.[68] It appears in three stanzas, each divided by prose dialogue. In the first stanza, the Gravedigger sings of his youth; in the second, he describes the effects of age; and in the third, he returns to the theme of grave digging. The song functions as a distillation of the broader concerns of the scene and an amplification of its comedic method, which is that of ironic incongruity. Hamlet asks, 'Has this fellow no feeling of his business? 'A sings in grave-making' (5.1.61). In response, Horatio reminds him that 'Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness' (5.1.61-4). Again, custom seems to have blunted the senses. The Gravedigger may have become inured to the physical realities of death and dissolution, but his grotesque familiarity veils a hidden wisdom that is developed through each stanza:

> In youth when I did love, did love,
> Methought it was very sweet
> To contract-a the time for -a my behove,
> O, methought there-a was nothing-a meet!

<div align="center">(5.1. 57-60)</div>

In each stanza, the Gravedigger explores the inexorable progress of time: first, the idle pleasures of a youthful courtship, in which time is sweetly spent in a pastoral romance, not the snatched assignation of burning passion. In the second stanza, the focus on 'my behove' is replaced by figure of 'age', which 'with his stealing steps / Hath clawed me in his clutch'. This is not the benign figure of Holbein's Death in his emblem *The Old Man, from The Dance of Death*, but a devious and beastly figure that seems to rise from the earth to ensnare and inhume the living (*Fig.2*). In a confused stygian image, the Gravedigger sings of being 'shipped […] into the land', where his body will compound with the earth 'As if I had never

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[68] Jan H. Blits, *Deadly Thought: Hamlet and the Human Soul*, Applications of Political Theory (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2001), p. 330.

been such'. (5.1.69-70) It is a striking image of corporeal obliteration, which describes the ephemerality of life.

In the final stanza, Shakespeare alters Vaux's verse, replacing 'house of clay' with 'pit of clay', which develops the idea of an ensnaring old age. The emendation may subtly reveal Shakespeare's paraphrase of Vaux's lyric to function better in the specific theatrical context of the Globe. While 'pit of clay' tilts the meaning of Vaux's 'house of clay' in the ways that I have suggested, the phrases remain broadly synonymous. The pit of clay is both the waiting space and a manifestation of the body itself. The poem 'Universal Dissolution', written by Hester Pulter, in 1648, uses the house of clay metaphor to describe the body's decay:

> My soul, why art thou sad at the decay
> Of this frail frame, this feeble house of clay?
> What can be expected from the humble birth
> Of this frail fabric, but to fall to earth?
> The bubbling fountain, being by nature led,
> Will rise no higher than her crystal head;
> Though many marble aqueducts it fill,
> Yet in a constant level it runs still.
> So mortal man, even from his very birth,
> Runs weeping on, then creeps into the earth.[69]

Hester Pulter's poem and the Gravedigger's lyrics imagine the circular journey of the body's return to earth, following the biblical assertion that 'All flesh shall perish together, and man shall return unto dust' (Job 34:15). But the Gravedigger and Pulter suggest that the accommodation is merely temporary. Pulter imagines it as a 'nap in black Oblivion's urn', whereas the Gravedigger builds the 'pit of clay' for a 'guest' - both wayfaring souls on a path to eternity.

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[69] Hester Pulter, 'Universal Dissolution' (Poem 6, Elemental Edition), in *The Pulter Project: Poet in the Making*, ed. Leah Knight and Wendy Wall (2018), http://pulterproject.northwestern.edu.

Hamlet's indignation at the Gravedigger's casual approach to death seems to give way to curiosity and a recognition that the Gravedigger is an expert witness to the process of decay and dissolution. His morbid curiosity is unsophisticated and sincere. He asks, 'How long will a man lie i'th' earth ere he rot?' (5.1.154). The Gravedigger warms to his role as guide and specialist, explaining the function of the skin as a barrier to the decaying effects of water. He lifts a skull from the grave and uses it as a specimen to further captivate his audience. He asserts, 'Here's a skull now hath lien you i'th' earth three and twenty years' (5.1.163-4). It is an irresistible invitation, which Hamlet accepts by asking who the skull belonged to and discovering that it was Yorick's. Here Shakespeare allows Hamlet to move through time: first to his now 'abhorred' childhood memory of riding on Yorick's back, then to the imagined ancient world of Alexander the Great. Hamlet now directs his questions to his scholarly companion, Horatio:

> HAMLET
> Dost thou think Alexander looked o'this fashion i'th' earth?
>
> HORATIO
> E'en so.
>
> HAMLET
> And smelt so? Pah!
> (5.1.187-190)

Yorick's skull becomes an imaginative conduit: between life and death, ancient and contemporary. In its biblical symbolism, the skull functions metonymically, like Golgotha, (the skull-shaped hill and site of Jesus's crucifixion) as the symbol of the loci of death and resurrection.[70] In these ways, the skull performs a significant role in articulating Hamlet's eschatological efforts, but in the popular imagination, it functions as a symbol of the play itself, a distilled articulation of its central concerns and endeavours. Its famous appearance is

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[70] Golgotha was the Hebrew word for the site of Jesus's crucifixion, 'the place of dead men's skulls' (Matthew 27:33).

perhaps less significant, at least to Hamlet's fascination with corporeal decay, than its smell. By the Gravedigger's account of the process, Yorick's skull should have completed the process of decomposition fifteen years prior to this moment, but the stench of decay lingers.

Disgust and fascination combine to provide the evidence that Hamlet has been searching for – that corporeal dissolution awaits. Recalling Luther's invective on reason, and my position at times throughout this chapter in suggesting that Hamlet eschews reason for faith, here the evidence occupies a threshold between reason and belief. Luther's loathing of reason was triggered when it was applied to the realm of faith, but the skull (and the Gravedigger's testimony) provides a privileged account of death that lies at the prohibited and unseen boundary of the grave. Clayton Mackenzie suggests that Hamlet's:

> intellectual duels with death […] articulate an elaborate and ritualized journey to the grave in which intellectual understanding stands as a kind of academicized riposte to the physical horrors of rotting mortality.[71]

My contention is that rather than hiding behind an intellectual shield, the unpleasantness of decomposition - its stench and squalor – substantiates Hamlet's understanding of the deceitfulness of humanity and that the revealed ignobility of the human form validates a desire for death, his *cupio dissolvi*. Hamlet's initial response is not intellectual but visceral; the sight and smell of the skull makes him nauseous. This is a subtle yet significant distinction, which explains Hamlet's turn towards an imagined past. Rather than Hamlet fleeing into his imagination, he is prosecuting his thesis, 'Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of / Alexander till 'a find it stopping a bung-hole?' For Horatio, this thought reveals a kind of heresy, but for Hamlet it is a sound dialectical response. The paradox is that Hamlet's application of reason provides him with a perspective on reason's destruction. As

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[71] Clayton G. MacKenzie, *Emblems of Mortality: Iconographic Experiments in Shakespeare's Theatre* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2000), p. 6.

well as the skull serving as a *memento mori* and as a biblical metonym for Christ's

crucifixion, it is also the part of the body which houses the brain, and with it the faculties of

imagination and thought. The expansion of the formula of Alexander's decomposition

conveys a sense of Hamlet's delight in its completeness – a puzzle solved:

> Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander
> returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make
> loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted
> might they not stop a beer-barrel?
>
> $\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad$ (5.1.198-201)

Hamlet performs the same process with Caesar, although Caesar is not destined for stopping

a beer barrel, but rather mixed with straw and effluent to patch a hole in a wall. The framing

of the message, that all humanity is subject to the unstoppable process of dissolution, is

intended to shock. The progress of the bodies of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar is not

linear but cyclical, they *return* to the dust; even their great powers are ephemeral.

The effect of all this is to expose humanity's belief in the capaciousness of its

intellect, the supremacy of its reasoning and imagination and the power of its agency as a

delusion. Once this has been achieved, and the encounter with Yorick's skull is the nail in the

coffin of man's hubris, the binary of life and death is wildly asymmetric. Life is exposed as a

type of fraud:

> a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more
>
> $\qquad\qquad\qquad\qquad$ (*Macbeth,* 5.5.24-26)

Hamlet's *cupio dissolvi* surfaces in his first soliloquy but thereafter takes the form of a

rebuttal of man as a masterpiece. A picture of eternity appears in relief to Hamlet's

meticulous analysis of life: it is delineated through its absent presence. Once Hamlet's picture

of life and afterlife is complete, he can let go of living and fearlessly allow providence to direct his course. The impediments against Hamlet's desire for his flesh to 'melt, / Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew' have been overcome or negated by providence (1.2.129-30). Reason itself has been exposed as man-made and precariously subjective.

The final act frequently reiterates this new certainty. Hamlet advises Horatio that 'There is a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them as we will'. (5.2.10-11) He speaks of a 'heaven ordinant', (5.2.49) and in the Folio, Hamlet returns to the ephemerality of life, declaring that 'a man's life's no more than to say 'one'' (F. 5.2.75). These hints of providentialism reach their most explicit articulation when Horatio tries to dissuade Hamlet from duelling with Laertes, which Hamlet swiftly rejects:

> Not a whit. We defy augury. There is special
> providence in the fall of a sparrow.
>
> <div align="center">(5.2.197-8)</div>

This first part of the passage resembles the Gospel of Matthew, 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing, and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father?' (Matthew 10.29) He returns to the 'To be, or not to be' soliloquy:

> If it be, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not
> now, yet it will come. The readiness is all, since no man
> of aught he leaves knows what is't to leave betimes. Let be.
>
> <div align="center">(5.2.197-202)</div>

The choices that Hamlet has struggled with are yet another facet of the great deception. As to our understanding of *cupio dissolvi*, Hamlet's 'readiness' to die belongs to the multivalence of the phrase and bears striking resemblance to Augustine's third degree of charity, as discussed in the first chapter, a willingness to die, which ascends to craving [*cupere*] and finally, the first degree, the doing. It is useful here to recall Ross Lerner's analysis of Lombard's commentary on Augustine's position on perfect charity through *cupio dissolvi*.

'To do it', Lerner observes, 'to dissolve the self - renders martyrdom an act of the highest perfection'.[72] Hamlet signals that he is now in train to the Augustinian model, *ready* to die. But does he crave death? His dismantling of the humanist deception of man as masterpiece has awoken him to the limitations of mortal life, its ephemerality and wickedness, a perspective which has elevated an eternal and spotless divine.

In the next chapter, Timon reaches similar conclusions to Hamlet on the inherent wickedness of the flesh, but expresses his antipathy with an aggressive simplicity, calling for the destruction of Athens and all its worldliness.

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[72] Ross Lerner, p. 74.

TIMON'S BOUNTIFUL OBLIVION

This chapter continues to reveal the theological and philosophical priorities that *cupio dissolvi* encapsulates. I explore *Timon of Athens* and demonstrate how its representation of greed and apocalyptic oblivion express a rejection of worldliness and a desire for moral, spiritual and social renewal. In the first section, I explain how *Timon of Athens* should be understood within the theatrical culture of early modern pageantry, that through this lens we may appreciate the spectacle of Timon's court and the inherent moral risk that this presents. The next short section explores the collapse of Timon's fortunes. Through a reading of Shakespeare's use of biblical allusion, I reveal how Timon's rejection and exile from Athens create the conditions by which he emerges as an embodiment of suffering and self-destruction. I argue that Timon, through his nakedness and asceticism, becomes an emblem of protest and warning. In the final section, I explore how Shakespeare uses the ambiguity and show of Timon's death to communicate a message of destruction and renewal.

I.   'Nothing brings me all things'

Michael Chorost's assertion that '*Timon of Athens* is a critique of money and money-orientated economies' represents the prevailing critical response to the play.[1] Numerous studies have focused on its economic aspects as they appear in, and relate to, particular historical and theatrical cultures. Debt and usury have been the principal themes but scholars have been inventive in their employment of *Timon of Athens* to expound on various economic issues. The play 'has attained a position of considerable prominence in [the] subfield' of

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[1] Michael Chorost, 'Biological Finance in Shakespeare's "*Timon of Athens*"', *English Literary Renaissance*, 21.3 (1991), 349–70 (p. 349).

literary studies known as 'the new economic criticism'.[2] Ivo Kamp's foreword to the

collection *Money and the Age of Shakespeare* offers a summary of 'the new economic

criticism':

> authors analyze the impact of nascent capitalism, commodity fetishism, commodity
> markets, the use of debt and credit, international trade, usury, prostitution and
> pandering, gift exchange, and poverty – all in direct connection to the early modern
> theatre.[3]

The play offers abundant and clear examples of all aspects of this definition. The language of

the text directs critical responses towards these themes. The prevalence of this particular

economic theme has led to many studies, including notable work by John Jowett and Amanda

Bailey.[4] The danger of this method of analysis is that such a strong focus on economics may

have led scholars to misconstrue *Timon* as being *about* money, rather than exploring the

philosophical outcomes that are experienced by characters as they are subject to the play's

economic system. The risk is to limit the play's intellectual scope, to potentially overlook the

text's value as a literary experiment and its metaphysical reach and intertextuality.

Some scholars have successfully treated the play's economics as a springboard to

broader political and philosophical debates. Derek Cohen's work on the politics of wealth, for

example, reaches far beyond the mechanisms of economic exchange to a sophisticated

consideration of value. His claim that 'the analysis of wealth which constitutes the play has

exposed [its] revolutionary nature' points towards its exciting possibilities in both

performance and scholarship.[5] Cohen's position builds on Karl Marx's fleeting observation

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[2] David Hershinow, 'Cash Is King: Timon, Diogenes, and the Search for Soveriegn Freedom', *Modern Philology*, 115.1 (2017), 53–79 (p. 53).
[3] Linda Woodbridge, *Money and the Age of Shakespeare: Essays in New Economic Criticism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). p. *viii.*
[4] John Jowett, 'Middleton and Debt in Timon of Athens', in *Money and the Age of Shakespeare*, ed. by Linda Woodbridge (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 219–35; Amanda Bailey, '"*Timon of Athens*", Forms of Payback, and the Genre of Debt', *English Literary Renaissance*, 41.2 (2011), 375–400.
[5] Derek Cohen, 'The Politics of Wealth: Timon of Athens', in *The Politics of Shakespeare*, by Derek Cohen (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1993), pp. 89–104 (p. 103).

that through *Timon of Athens* 'Shakespeare excellently depicts the real nature of money'.

Marx goes on to describe the principal qualities of money:

1. It is the visible divinity - the transformation of all human and natural properties into their contraries, the universal confounding and distorting of things: impossibilities are soldered together by it
2. It is the common whore, the common procurer of people and nations. [6]

Another agent of conflation in the play is alchemy. For the early modern users of *cupio dissolvi*, alchemy is often a rich source of metaphor, with themes that parallel the priorities and concerns of *cupio*: the process of purgation and transmutation which operate on the base metal are imagined on the soul of the individual. Anna Feuer and David Bergeron separately identify a seam of allusion that runs through the text, revealing the play's alchemical processes from differing perspectives. Bergeron imagines Timon as the failed alchemist, whereas Feuer sees him as the alchemical product - 'a corrupt metal undergoing alchemical transmutation' - through a process of destruction and renewal. [7] By focusing on the central role of gold in the alchemical process, as well as its symbolic power, Feuer and Bergeron's accounts present a dynamic version of the economic readings.

Throughout much of this scholarship, Timon is erroneously seen as a rich man who loses his fortune. Bergeron, arguing from this position, explains that the structure of the play, relating to an alchemical process, moves 'from gold to lack of gold to gold again'.[8] The first two parts, 'gold to lack of gold' suggest that Timon was rich and lost his riches, but this is a misunderstanding of Timon's position. At the beginning of the play, Timon only appears rich, his wealth being an illusion created by debt. Accounts that adopt this false premise, that

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[6] Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. by Martin Milligan (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1959), pp. 60–61.

[7] Anna Feuer, 'Fair Foul and Right Wrong: The Language of Alchemy in Timon of Athens', *Early Modern Literary Studies*, 16.1 (2012), p. 1.

[8] David Bergeron, 'Alchemy and "*Timon of Athens*"', *College Language Association*, 13.4 (1970), 364–73 (p. 368).

Timon's wealth is anything more than an illusion, are falling into the trap of Timon's court, dazzled by his largesse and failing to discern the appearance of riches from riches. This oversight renders Timon's suffering a personal tragedy of material and social loss. What we witness is the disintegration of Athenian artifice and the opportunity this presents for renewal. Bergeron's observations on the structure of the play should perhaps be revised as follows: the appearance of gold (through credit), exposure (when the line of credit runs dry), real gold (in the form of spiritual truth). Despite failing to articulate the illusion of Timon's court, Bergeron and Feuer's efforts in revealing the alchemical allusion elevate our understanding and take us towards a more satisfying account of the deep spiritual pulse of the play.

The play's 'enigmatic' Folio title, *The Life of Tymon of Athens,* serves to direct us away from tragedy and death, which itself remains ambiguous, towards a journey of spiritual awakening which alludes to the life of Christ.[9] The title reveals the play's function as a parable, along the lines of Grace Tiffany's analysis, 'Shakespeare's Parables'. Tiffany's position invites us to understand Timon as a parable of truth against artifice, with his exile from Athens and the vitriol that he levels at the city functioning as a revelation of a profound awakening. Those who view *Timon of Athens* as a tragedy mistakenly regard his loss of riches, which were only ever an illusion, as tragic. Another aspect of the tragedy could be the nature of his ambiguous death, but this too must be understood through the lens of salvation. Timon, like the iniquitous city of Athens, must be destroyed for the sake of renewal.

While these economic readings offer insight and a degree of conceptual scope, particularly when economics provide a foundation to ideas of identity, politics, culture and belief, I am drawn towards scholarship that recognises that *Timon of Athens* involves but is

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[9] William Shakespeare, Thomas Middleton, and others, *The Life of Timon of Athens*, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 25. In Shakespeare's histories, 'life' is used in *The Life and Death of King John* (1596) and *The Life of Henry the Fifth* (1598-9). The Folio title may be the product of the Folio editor and not Shakespeare's original intention.

not *about* economics. The scholars who I believe have provided the most successful readings are Tiffany, who posits the notion of *Timon of Athens* as a parable; G.W. Knight, with his passionate account of the play in *The Wheel of Fire*; Ken Jackson, in his essay on Derrida and God; and Julia Lupton, in her essay paralleling *Timon of Athens* with the Book of Job. These scholars variously consider Timon's transformation as a type of awakening, a line of analysis that sets the direction of my reading.[10]

Knight argues that in the play we see 'shapes of the finite and the phantoms of the infinite, as complementary aspects of the eternal and ever-present interaction in which are both man and God.'[11] His analysis reflects on Timon's journey between the temporal and spiritual, a dialectic that is repeatedly explored through biblical narratives and develops the 'influential tradition of biblical paraphrase [which] allowed writers to extemporize upon scripture, merging scriptural narratives with their own.'[12] I believe that we see this merging of scriptural narratives in *Timon of Athens* and that each contributes to the articulation of a paradigm of destructive renewal, Timon's *cupio dissolvi*.

Lupton suggests that 'Shakespeare draws on Job in all of its proto-secular literary ambivalence, to create a religious zone in his texts that is not strictly theological, in which God enters as an afterthought.'[13] Lupton's insightful reading offers a useful template, but her focus on Job, I would suggest, tethers her analysis to the new economic criticism, owing to Job's articulation of loss unless we understand that our focus must be on the suffering that Job experiences through those losses. This is true for our analysis and understanding of

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[10] Ken Jackson, '"One Wish" or the Possibility of the Impossible: Derrida, the Gift, and God in *Timon of Athens*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 52.1 (2001), 34–66; George Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy*, Routledge Classics (London; New York: Routledge, 2001); Grace Tiffany, 'Shakespeare's Parables', *Reformation*, 16.1 (2011), 145–60.
[11] Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, p. 271.
[12] Killeen, Smith, and Willie, p. 451.
[13] Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Thinking with Shakespeare: Essays on Politics and Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 158.

Timon. Ivor Morris suggests that suffering in Shakespeare's great tragedies is built on a

biblical template. In his analysis of *King Lear*, he posits:

> It is through the suffering of the flesh that the afflicted Lear, throwing off the
> protection of man-made 'lendings', seeks to attain truth: in the smell of mortality,
> rather than in human achievement, lies the means of perception and hope.[14]

Job and Timon, like Lear, have been stripped of man-made protections and forced to suffer,

as Morris puts it, 'the smell of mortality'. Perhaps, then, suffering for Timon is the process of

destructive renewal: the loss of his status and dignity but more profoundly, the shock of

realising the deceitfulness of humanity. A biblical reading of *Timon of Athens* requires

narratives that speak of sinfulness, exile and spiritual emergence. Thus, the focus of my

analysis rests chiefly on the narrative of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the

Book of Ezekiel. [15] It seems most appropriate to consider a confluence of biblical narratives

in any fair attempt to reflect the nature of Shakespeare's Bible reading, as suggested by

Hannibal Hamlin, and described by George Herbert as 'reading the Bible to a "constellation,"

in which different "stars" (passages) combine to make one bright shining, and meaningful,

whole.'[16] My analysis explores the influence of these two narratives in the following ways:

Sodom, Jerusalem and Athens are sinful societies that face destruction for their wickedness.

Timon, like Ezekiel, becomes a 'watchman' of their sin.[17] Despite his exile from the city, like

Lot, he is unable to escape its immorality. His death, and its ambiguity, is an essential part of

the greater process of renewal.

This reading provides another instance of what Lupton describes as Shakespeare's

acknowledgement 'of radical interdependence: of each human on other humans, of the human

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[14] Ivor Morris, *Shakespeare's God: The Role of Religion in the Tragedies* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 185.
[15] Genesis 18:19.
[16] Hamlin, *The Bible in Shakespeare*, p. 311.
[17] Ezekiel 3:17.

on the creaturely, and of secular writing on sacred writing'.[18] Lupton articulates the superimposition of sacred templates onto secular events. It is the progress of *cupio dissolvi* from an explicit expression of the Pauline desire for death and divine union to the signifier of a paradigm of destructive renewal. Beyond this, I will provide a reading of Timon's death as an awakening of truth, one which understands its ambiguity as an essential aspect of its message. I start with an exploration, indebted to M. C. Bradbrook's analysis, of Timon's court as a type of pageant. Interpretating the court as a pageant will provide a useful illustration of the performance and artifice of Timon's court and reveal a connection between literary forms, in this instance the conflation of the pageant and a type of morality play whereby the Bible was used as a 'collection of *sententiae to be mined*'.[19] I then explore the distorted and extravagant culture of 'shew', in which human interactions are commoditised and women are marginalised. I examine the play's simplistic characters and allegorical message, particularly in the exchange between the Poet and Painter, Timon's interactions with his guests and the arrival and dismissal of the masque. My intention here is to reveal Timon's court in the model of Sodom and the sinful Jerusalem. In the second section of my analysis, I will look at Timon's awakening to the artifice of Athens and his exile, once again, paralleling this with Lot's escape from Sodom. I suggest how Timon reflects Lot but also complicates his narrative. In the final section, I explore Timon's destructive ambitions, directed towards Athens and himself as an inextricable product of the city and its sin.

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[18] Lupton, p. 158.

[19] *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. by Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring, and Sarah Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 78.

II.   The 'Shew': Pageant and Paragone

The first two acts of Timon *of Athens* establish the nature of Timon's court, which is mercantile, decadent and, as it will transpire, falsehearted. Timon is the object of self-serving sycophants - poets, painters and jewellers - who feed off his apparent wealth and generosity. Through the court's show and pageantry, the theme of truth versus artifice is explored and from within this theme, the Christian dimension of a dialectic between the licentious flesh and pure soul emerges. In this section of the chapter, I explore Timon's court as a theatrical pageant and posit that by its celebration of appearance over substance and its exploration of vices and virtues, it provides the ideal culture from which Timon can fall.

Bradbrook provides a far-reaching and vivid introduction to the play, describing it as 'a work of profound and disturbed feeling, of broken and uneven magnificence.'[20] Bradbrook's work moves through many of the play's major critical interests: an example of changing theatrical practice, a reflection of the economic system of Elizabethan and Jacobean aristocracy, fleeting but perceptive references to the imagery of cannibalism, and Timon as a moral role rather than a three-dimensional character. For Bradbrook, this last point relates to the influence of early modern pageantry on the play. She develops a definition of *shew* from Ben Jonson's *Masque of Fame* (1609). She writes:

> A shew, developing as distinct numbers or pageants, laid flatly against each other, its scenes and characters are united by rhythmic contrast. Costume is gorgeous and symbolic; speech in the form of set orations or brisk debate; one leading character may dominate (and there are likely to be few if any female characters). Contrast and display are the vehicles, times and seasons, vices and virtues, gods and goddesses the subjects.[21]

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[20] M.C. Bradbrook, *The Tragic Pageant of 'Timon of Athens': An Inaugural Lecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 1.
[21] Ibid., p. 17.

We can recognise several aspects of this definition in *Timon* including its attention to vices and virtues and the briskness of debate. It may also justify the omission of substantive female characters. Shakespeare's co-author, Middleton, moved between plays and pageants and was likely engaged with *Timon* around the time of his involvement with the delayed accession pageant of King James I, *The Magnificent Entertainment for King James* (1604). The speech that Middleton is credited with is that of the allegorical figure of Zeal. It suggests that a male sovereign has now returned the realm to a stability that was lost in the preceding reigns of Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth:

> All states,
> From nobles to spirits of meaner fates,
> Moved opposite to nature and to peace,
> As if the same had been th' Antipodes.
> But see the virtue of a regal eye,
> Th' attractive wonder of man's majesty.
> Our globe is drawn in a right line again,
> And now appear new faces and new men.
>
> (ll. 2124-2131) [22]

Parallels may be drawn between Zeal's panegyric and Timon's court of sycophants, but perhaps more relevant is the figure of Zeal itself, to which Middleton returns in another pageant, *The Triumphs of Truth* (1613). In *The Magnificent Entertainment,* Zeal, dressed in a robe adorned with painted flames, passionately burns for King James, whereas the Zeal figure of *The Triumphs of Truth* has become 'Truth's champion […] the scourge of sin.' (240). This reflects the role that Timon adopts when the veil of artifice is removed. Timon becomes the most implacable enemy of sinful Athens, a pageant city of show and artifice, and of himself as a product of the city. He seeks the destruction of both.

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[22] Thomas Middleton, *The Magnificent Entertainment for King James* (1604) in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works : The Collected Works*, ed. by Gary Taylor et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

If Timon's court is a pageant, then the opening scene, which Anthony Dawson and Gretchen Minton attribute to Shakespeare, establishes the allegorical language for subsequent scenes. For *The Magnificent Entertainment*, the first triumphal arch was 'populated with a number of allegorical figures among whom there are the six daughters of the *Genius* of the City.'[23] The scene was financed by London's Italian merchants, and it is through a vision of their world, a mercantile world, that King James is introduced to the city. The six virtuous daughters of the city function as a living sculpture, an artistic product that is employed to elevate the moral standing of the world of business.

Timon's court, at the opening of the play, explores these issues of art and artifice as commodities. Timon's opening appears, at first glance, to be a rather straightforward dialogue between a painter and a poet, waiting to exhibit their work and successfully secure Timon's patronage. They are joined by other artisans and courtiers, all of whom seem to regard Timon's court as a private marketplace, with Timon as the sole customer. But the exchange between the Painter and the Poet and, later, the introduction of Apemantus, who seems to see through the flattery of Timon's petitioners and by his cynicism, foreshadows Timon's fall. This dialogue reveals the central paradigm of the play and its dramaturgical method: its exploration of truth against artifice, articulated in this scene through the Renaissance debate as to the relationship between art and nature, and the archetypes that keenly focus the narrative on this message.

The scene provides a context for Timon's largesse and the mercantile quality of exchange that appears to inform most social interactions. It is from this culture that Timon removes himself later in the play. The Painter and the Poet, by their presence together, enact the Paragone, a Renaissance debate on the hierarchy of artistic form. The debate itself is

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[23] David Bergeron, 'Harrison, Jonson and Dekker: The Magnificent Entertainment for King James (1604)', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 31 (1968), 445–48 (p. 445).

revealed as an affectation of creative intellect which thinly veils their mercantile ambitions. The moment is followed by the eavesdropping on the Merchant and the Jeweller. In placing these two pairs of artisans within the same scene, occupying the same stage moment, we are directed towards understanding these characters as occupying the same commercial world. Culture is sold alongside other goods, and each belongs to a revision or containment of nature through human craft. These human cultural products, however, can only be understood or reanimated by reference to the nature of and in its creation. The Jeweller shows the 'water' in the jewel (1.1.19), the Poet speaks of his inspiration as a 'gum which oozes' (1.1.22), and the Poet declares that the Painter's work 'tutors nature' (1.1.38).

The scene moves between the mercantile and the sublime. The Poet, for example, speaks of 'spirits' that have gathered in the antechamber as conjurations of a deified 'magic of bounty' before abruptly turning the passage towards the substance beneath the show, plainly identifying the Merchant, and with it, the business of the scene (1.1.6-7). His allusion to magic, spirits, and conjuring casts Timon's largesse as something preternatural or perhaps more caustically as trickery. The Poet and the Painter know their fellow artisans, reinforcing the idea that they occupy the same world of trade. Timon himself is commodified by the exaggerated praise of the Merchant and the Jeweller, who describes his unsurpassed 'untireable and continuate goodness' as an item of wares (1.1.9). The scene has rapidly developed several versions of commodity: the material goods of the Merchant and the Jeweller, valued in their natural state; the artistic offerings of the Poet and Painter; the abstract commodities of Timon himself; and the praise that these various artisans offer for patronage. The court, according to the Poet's description, resembles a stock exchange, busy valuing the worth of artifacts and people alike. Timon is both commodified and commodifier, his fortune 'subdues and properties' others (1.1.59).

The Poet describes the verse, perhaps with false modesty, as slipping idly from him and goes on to explain how his inspiration manifests. He draws on nature in a mixed metaphor, a river's current returning to the figure of a flame, which, alongside the sudden turns towards more practical matters, contributes to the artificiality of his rhetoric. The Poet's loftiness establishes the idea of artifice. When the Painter and the Poet are discussing the product of their artistic endeavours, their exchange mirrors the early dialogue between the Merchant and the prodigal Jeweller. The Merchant's request to see the Jewel - 'O, pray let's see't' (1.1.13) - becomes 'Let's see your piece' for the Poet (1.1.29). This mirroring makes the connections between the artisans and their products explicit. Beneath the flamboyant rhetoric of the Poet's description of the painting lies an important discussion of the notion of art and its relationship with nature. The painting is a vivification of the figure of Timon, animated from its silence and immobility through verbs: the painting '*speaks* his own standing', mental power '*shoots* forth' from the eye, Timon's rhetorical grace 'moves in [his] lip' (1.1.32-34). The image is not just alike but alive and this aliveness becomes something more dangerous when the Poet later declares, 'It tutors nature; artificial strife / Lives in these touches livelier than life.' (1.1.38-9). The Poet's assertion develops the idea of his creative competition with the Painter and reinforces the artificiality of his rhetoric. It also reaches beyond character to a concept of art that functions beyond a mimetic response to nature; the artist seeks to correct and to improve. It reiterates the Aristotelian sentiment that 'human skill either completes what nature is incapable of completing or imitates nature'.[24] This, then, is the world that Timon inhabits, even symbolises, at the beginning of the play. Timon's response to the portrait complicates the binary relationship between nature and art, developing a notion that a person in their everyday life performs a version of themselves:

> The painting is almost the natural man,
> For since dishonour traffics with man's nature,

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[24] Aristotle, David Bostock, and Robin Waterfield, *Physics* (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1999), p. 51.

> He is but outside; these pencilled figures are
> Even such as they give out.
>
> (1.1.161-64)

This is a rather opaque passage, partly because of what John Jowett identifies as Timon's 'strained conceit' regarding outside/out.[25] Timon recognises a sincerity that is absent in real life. It is a powerful moment in which he seems to acknowledge the distance between the three versions of himself; as natural man, painted subject and Timon, the role of rich benefactor, a position built on credit. He sees the painting as a more authentic presentation.

In the Poet's hyperbole, metaphors are dense and jumbled as they merge, sometimes within a line. The crowd of senators that follows Timon becomes a 'confluence' and 'great flood' (1.1.43). The Poet's verse, captured on a 'wide sea of wax', seems to emanate from an arrow-like quill, which 'flies an eagle flight, bold and forth on, / Leaving no tract behind' (I.1.49-51). Shakespeare's use of conceit and mixing of metaphors invites the audience to experience the spectacle of the court for themselves. Words, that are shown to be slippery and inherently untrustworthy, must be carefully questioned. For this task, Shakespeare provides us with Apemantus, 'a churlish philosopher'.[26] He functions as a guide and satirist of the court's deceitfulness. Apemantus, whom Knight labels 'the philosopher of hate', makes another important contribution to our understanding of Timon by foreshadowing how Timon's philosophy changes over the course of the play from trust and magnanimity at the start of the play to bitterness and contempt. The contrast may have been further exploited on the early modern stage with, as David Wiles explains, the 'stunted' and 'dog-like attributes' of Robert Armin playing against Richard Burbage.[27] Wiles' assertion helps us to arrive at a

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[25] William Shakespeare, Thomas Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. by Tony Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton, (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), p.181.

[26] Ibid., p. 155.

[27] David Wiles, *Shakespeare's Clown: Actor and Text in the Elizabethan Playhouse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 155.

richer understanding of Apemantus, whose withering insults give him command even against the supposedly eloquent Poet.

Apemantus's derisive commentary is particularly useful in placing the behaviour of Timon's court within a context of Christian allusion. When Timon invites his exclusively male party to dine, for example, Apemantus ridicules the event by suggesting a hidden homosexual objective:

> TIMON: Wilt thou dine with me, Apemantus?
>
> APEMANTUS: No, I eat not lords.
>
> TIMON: And thou shouldst, thou'dst anger ladies.
>
> APEMANTUS: O, they eat lords - so they come by great bellies.

<div align="right">(1.1.206-210)</div>

The play's modern editors have arrived at the same conclusion as Apemantus: Minton and Dawson describe the dinner as a 'perverse form of communion'.[28] If we too adopt the interpretation of the dinner as a type of unholy Eucharist, we begin to see Timon's court emerge from a symbol of consumption and greed to something more immoral and, within the context of the bible narratives to which the play responds, wicked. Athens becomes another Sodom and is thus destined for destruction. Timon of Athens shares many of the characteristics of licentious and damned biblical societies: Babylon, Sodom and Gomorrah and Jerusalem. Before I turn our attention to Sodom and Gomorrah, let us briefly explore the relationship between Athens and Jerusalem. Ezekiel's account of the city is particularly revealing:

> Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels *made* of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and madest to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them, […]
> Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread and abundance of idleness was in her, and in her daughters: neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy.

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[28] Shakespeare and Middleton, *Timon of Athens,* ed. Dawson and Minton, p.186.

(Ezekiel 16:17 and 49)

In Eziekiel's Jerusalem, like Timon's Athens, profligacy breeds idleness, idolatry and a lack of charity.

III.   Timon's Downfall

The next short section explores the collapse of Timon's fortunes. I develop the reading of biblical allusions that I introduced in the previous section, talking in more detail about the parallels between Lot and Timon, and I introduce other narratives that help to illuminate the play's themes of destructive renewal. I reveal how Timon's rejection and exile from Athens create the conditions by which he emerges as an embodiment of suffering and self-destruction.

Timon's financial precarity is revealed throughout the second and third acts, which begin with the Senator calculating the depths of Timon's indebtedness. It is worth noting that the play's modern editors believe these Acts to be either ambiguous in their authorship, as with 2.1 and 3.6, or the work of Thomas Middleton. For my purposes, in demonstrating a strong connection between the collapse of Timon's state and biblical apocalypses, the theme appears uninterrupted across scenes of variant authorship.

The figurative language of tides, floods and the ocean saturate the scene. Timon's prodigality is like the ceaseless motion of the 'raging' sea; his rising debts threaten to break their banks, which 'cannot hold' (2.1.4), and 'no reason / Can sound his state in safety.' (2.1.12-13) The scale and wildness of these images develop a sense that Timon is contending with unfathomable forces. But as much as he is at the mercy of these forces, Timon's behaviour is their source: his 'riot', his prodigality, is an endless 'flow' (2.1.3).

These scenes conflate a number of biblical themes and narratives: the 'flood' (Genesis 6:9), the 'ungrateful servant' (Matthew 18:23) and the 'prodigal son' (Luke 15:12). The central threat of the 'Flood', partly invoked by the use of metaphor, is that of a forthcoming apocalypse. It is part-way towards the Day of Judgement, as presented in the Book of Revelation. The parallel is made by Flavius, also conveying a growing sense of terror:

> the future comes apace.
> What shall defend the interim, and at length
> How goes our reckoning?
> (2.2.148-150)

Timon's response is removed from the spiritual parallels that Flavius presents, concerned instead with the land he owns, which he believes stretches to Lacedaemon. In Act Two, Scene One, language emerged as something potentially deceptive, even dangerous. It became part of the sea metaphor, the Senator fearing that his request for repayment would be 'tossed and turned [...] in words,' words that, like waves, drown and devour (2.1.26). Language is seen as an instrument of obfuscation and deception. This is true for the mirage of Timon's court and in the act of theatre-making itself. The vast stretch of Timon's land, dry and solid, is revealed as merely an article of language:

> O my good lord, the world is but a word;
> Were it all yours to give it in a breath,
> How quickly were it gone.
> (2.2.152-4)

His observation demonstrates that words are used against Timon to curry favour, and *by* Timon to project power and influence. Despite their breath-like intangibility, they are the fundamental element of Timon's trade and usury. Flavius illustrates this exchange with an imitation of Timon's followers - '"Great Timon, noble, worthy, royal Timon!"' -

and laments that 'when the means are gone that buy this praise, / The breath is gone whereof this praise is made' (2.2.168). The language of trade, and its biblical intersection, is another manifestation of the deceptiveness of words. The play's main currency, other than gold, is 'talents' (a biblical measure of currency) but their value at different points of the play is unreliable. These inconsistencies have been attributed to the play's multiple authorship, Shakespeare's confusion and working revision or an expression of the play's themes, which exaggerate and confuse the value of money, detaching it from all reality.

Perhaps less scholarly attention has been given to the biblical parallels of using talents, not merely as a historically accurate unit of currency for a depiction of the ancient world, but also as a device to reiterate or bring to mind biblical messages, drawing on the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, which deals with themes of money-lending and the merciful recovery and forgiveness of such debts; as I previously mentioned, debt itself provided a biblical analogue to the debt that is owed to God and paid in death, and to the Parable of the Talents (Matt. 18.21 and 25.14-30). Gabriel Egan argues that 'Christianity is not explicitly mentioned in the play but is alluded to within explorations of philosophical principles.'[29] He goes on to demonstrate the parallels of the Parable of the Talents with Timon's later discovery of buried gold, which I will discuss shortly. If we suppose that the parable may be operating from Act Two, we might understand Timon's requests for money as a series of attempts to recover his invested talents. The refusal of his friends is an inversion of the biblical parable. This refusal also echoes Peter's denial of Jesus: for Timon, his hoped-for rescuers 'have all been touched and found base metal, / For they have all denied him'. (3.3.6-7) The word 'denied' is repeated twice more in the ensuing lines and, seemingly to

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[29] Gabriel Egan, *Shakespeare and Marx*, Oxford Shakespeare Topics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 111.

further reveal the allusion, Sempronius pauses on the thought of this denial, 'as Ventidius and Lucullus denied him / And does he send to me? Three-hmm?' (3.3.9-10).

These scenes are occupied by Timon's request for support and its denial. At various points, allusions to biblical parables and narratives conflate with the established metaphorical language of alchemy, and a Dantean vision of hell in which Timon's false friends are tortured by pouring molten coin down their throats. Two versions of man emerge: first, that of a 'wicked beast', the 'monstrousness of man' (3.2.75); and the other, a self-interested 'flatterer' (3.2.68). The images reveal a suspicion of the world as a place of deception. Lucius's denial is seen as evidence of 'the world's soul' (3.2.66), which Minton and Dawson gloss as 'the worldly soul […] the engine that drives the world'.[30] In other words, worldliness – consumption, materialism, and greed – motivates the actions of humanity.

Before Timon abandons the city, he hosts a banquet for his friends. Like the tainted communion of Act One, this second banquet is a corruption of Christ's Last Supper, except that each of Timon's guests is Judas. Timon starts the meal by offering a prayer of grace. He speaks directly to the gods, but he also adopts the role of a god so that when he says, 'You great benefactors, sprinkle our society with thankfulness' he is referring to his own benefaction (3.7.69). The rest of his advice for the gods can be understood in this way, as if he is offering his experiences to the gods as a warning:[31]

> For your own gifts, make yourselves praised, but reserve still to give, lest your deities be despised. Lend to each man enough, that one need not borrow of men, men would forsake the gods. Make the meat be beloved more than the man that gives it. Let no assembly of twenty be without a score of villains.

Joseph Harris observes in this passage that Timon is rarely content with merely wishing divine *punishment* onto others […] he also wishes further vices'. He calls these vengeful

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[30] Shakespeare and Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Dawson and Minton, p. 232.

[31] Ken Jackson posits that Timon's prayer to future gods is a prayer to the Christian God, a personal god who intimately knows his creation. Ken Jackson, *Shakespeare and Abraham* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015), p. 106.

imprecations 'misanthropic opative[s]' – a humanity-hating wish.[32] Within Timon's

misanthropy, there continues a vein of misogyny, when Timon asks that 'If there sit twelve

women at the table, let a dozen of them be as they are', suggesting that women are so

naturally flawed as to require no alteration to fit his curse. The focus of the rest of the prayer

turns more directly to his guests. He calls for their annihilation and declares that his gathered

friends are 'nothing':

> The rest of your foes, O gods – the senators of Athens, together with the common lag
> of people – what is amiss in them, you gods, make suitable for destruction. For these
> my present friends, as they are to me nothing, so in nothing bless them and to nothing
> are they welcome.
>
> (3.7.70-83)

Timon's 'misanthropic opative' is his final performative act in Athens. He uses it to reveal

his fury and curse those who have failed him. The clearest allusion here is to the Last Supper,

but other Christian allusions operate in the passage, and the play's modern editors have

suggested that when Timon serves lukewarm water to his guests, he is alluding to Revelation

3:16: 'Therefore because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, it will come to pass,

that I shall spew thee out of my mouth'. A little later, Timon sprinkles water in the faces of

his guests, casting himself a priest, and cleansing his congregation of sin with holy water.

Timon's final imprecation is a compressed curse, 'Burn house, sink Athens, henceforth hated

be / Of Timon man and all humanity!' (3.7.104).

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[32] Joseph Harris, *Misanthropy in the Age of Reason: Hating Humanity from Shakespeare to Schiller* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 35.

IV.   Timon's Nakedness: A Sign and Wonder

I argue that Timon, through his nakedness and asceticism, becomes an emblem of protest and warning. Act Four begins with Timon's longest soliloquy of the play, addressed to the city walls:

> Let me look back on thee. O thou wall
> That girdles in those wolves, dive in the earth
> And fence not Athens! Matrons, turn incontinent;
> Obedience, fail in children; slaves and fools,
> Pluck the grave wrinkled senate from the bench
> And minister in their steads.
>
> (4.1.1-6)

It appears as the first fully realised expression of Timon's misanthropy, a vitriolic imprecation for the suffering and destruction of Athens. Its location, beyond the city walls, is important as a liminal space between the 'culture' of Athens and the wilderness beyond. Athens, a symbol of greed and materiality, becomes another Sodom and Gomorrah, deserving destruction for the wickedness and impiety of its people. The Sulphur and fire that destroy Sodom and Gomorrah manifest through Timon's language, as he urges the gods to strip away the veil of civility to reveal the true and abhorrent nature of man beneath. His soliloquy functions as a series of reversals, commencing with the city walls, which Timon urges to 'dive in the earth, / And fence not Athens!' (4.1.2-3). Dawson and Minton suggest that Timon wants the protection provided by the city walls to be removed, but as Timon sees the city already occupied by wolves, the removal of the walls would release that contained wickedness to the world beyond. It thus speaks of a broader desire for destruction, emanating from but not limited to Athens.

A comparison to Lot's flight from Sodom is particularly revealing of the devastating power of language. Lot and his family are given safe passage out of Sodom before it is destroyed, but Lot's wife looks back on the iniquitous city and becomes a pillar of salt, the

symbol here drawing on the ancient function of salt as a purifying agent. This is a rather complex comparison, but the essential elements are evident, although underdeveloped. It is perhaps tempting to see Timon's observation of the city, his very deliberate looking back, as the same liberty that ruined Lot's wife, but these moments are dissimilar in their objective: Lot's wife's gaze seems to suggest a belonging to the city and a pathos for its fate, whereas Timon is removed from Athens and looks back to curse it. The difference between Lot's wife and Timon is perhaps fleeting, as we soon begin to realise that Timon is part of the sinful city and that his curse bounces off its walls and returns to him. The ambiguous nature of his death, which is preceded by images of the beach and foamy sea, may suggest that he too, eventually, becomes a pillar of salt.

Timon follows his curse on Athens with a litany of reversals against matrons, children, aged authority, and virgins, invoking a scene of chaos and licentiousness. He longs for the moral boundary, like the city walls, to be removed and hell to break loose, for Matrons to 'turn incontinent', unable to control their sexual appetites (4.1.3). The etymology of 'incontinent' offers an indication of the nature of Athenian society and Timon's curse; the word without its prefix derives from the Latin *continent-em* which means 'holding-together'.[33] It appears that chastity, like obedience in children, is socially acquired. The wives of Athens are not turning but *re*turning to sexual promiscuity. They are shedding any semblance of virtue to unveil their dormant transgression. There are striking similarities to Dante's description of hell: the dark depths of Malebolge, the eighth circle where fraudsters reside after 'the special trust whence men on men rely' is irrevocably broken.[34] Timon imagines a carnival of dissipation in which virgins copulate in their 'parents' eyes' and are

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[33] "Continent, adj." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/40233. Accessed 28 October 2021.
[34] Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: The Inferno*, trans. by James Romanes Sibbald (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1884), p. 80.

thus converted to 'general filth' (4.1.6-8). The use of 'convert', which means 'to turn back, cause to return', is part of a series of indications of reversal.[35] Timon is not pleading for a good society to be turned bad, but for the fragile system of social controls to be removed, knowing that immorality lies beneath. The revolution that Timon describes is both a social uprising and a 'circular movement', returning humankind to a naked, fallen state.[36]

The rhetoric of Timon's soliloquy turns from the domestic towards the monumental instruments of societal organisation and control:

> Piety and fear,
> Religion to the Gods, peace, justice, truth,
> Domestic awe, night-rest and neighbourhood,
> Instruction, manners, mysteries and trades,
> Degrees, observances, customs and laws,
> Decline to your confounding contraries –
> And let confusion live!
>
> (4.1.15-21)

In appealing to these social forces, this passage is perhaps the most incantatory of the soliloquy, drawing together the structures of social order to alchemically 'decline to [their] confounding contraries', to reveal the baseness and confusion of mankind. The curse continues to summon the bleakest maladies to befall Athens, until Timon has worn out his rhetoric. Timon, who earlier in the play flashed as 'a phoenix' (2.1.32), declares that he will bear nothing from the city 'but nakedness' (4.1.33). He peels away, or rather as Jowett's stage direction invites, 'tears off his clothes', to remove the contamination of the city and return himself to simplicity and truth.[37] He will be 'the poorer and yet more essentially real, or true, for his state'.[38] Athens will return to the fall of man, but Timon will occupy a prelapsarian moment in which his nakedness signifies innocence. In the Old Testament, so Judy Kronenfeld suggests, nakedness is not a symbol of innocence but a state of inducing or

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[35] "convert, v." †3. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2021. Web. 28 October 2021.
[36] "revolution, n." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2021. Web. 2 November 2021.
[37] Shakespeare and Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. Jowett, p. 261.
[38] George Wilson Knight, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Challenge: On the Rise of Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes* (London: Routledge, 1977), p. 134.

signifying shame, vulnerability, destitution and humiliation.[39] Adam and Eve's nakedness, or rather the discovery of their nakedness, is the signifying moment of the Fall. In Exodus, Aaron's forging of the golden calf leads the Israelites to become 'naked unto their shame' and yet more powerfully in the Wycliffe Bible, 'the people were made bare; for Aaron had plundered them for the shame of the filthhood of the making of the idol' (Exo. 32.25).

Biblical nakedness is complex. Thomas Stoughton, in his 1610 treatise, *The Dignity of God's Children*, demonstrates this multivalence:

> How honourable then is it for such beggerly persons as we were (that were not onely starke naked, and utterly without any good apparell, but that also were clothed before with most polluted garments of all, sinne, &c.) to be clothed with so rich a garment as Christ Jesus is? [40]

For Stoughton, the contaminating garments of moral indigence, which leaves man 'clogged with their sins, and cloathed with corruption & mortality', may be cast off and replaced by the 'rich' apparel of Christ. [41] The disrobing of sin is thus a symbol of penitence and preparation for a deep connectedness to God. In *Isaiah*, Babylon is imagined as a proud, transgressive woman. God orders her to 'sit in the dust' and to 'loose thy locks: make bare the feet: uncover the leg, and pass through the floods' that her 'filthiness shall be discovered, and [her] shame shall be seen' (Isa. 47.1-3). Babylon's naked shame works together with the baptismal cleansing of the river's flood waters (Isa. 47.8). Timon embodies the proud Babylon, stripped and shamed. Perhaps, following this parallel, we may read the idolatry of Athens, expressed through 'commodity fetishism', in Babylon's audacious assertion of individualism and rejection of God: 'I am and none else' (Isa 45.5).

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[39] Judy Kronenfeld, *King Lear and the Naked Truth: Rethinking the Language of Religion and Resistance* (London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 18.

[40] Thomas Stoughton, *The Dignitie of Gods Children. or an Exposition of 1. Iohn 3. 1.2.3 Plentifully Shewing the Comfortable, Happie, and Most Blessed State of All Gods Children, and Also on the Contrarie, the Base, Fearefull, and Most Wofull Condition of All Other That Are Not the Children of God* (London: Thomas Haueland, 1610), p. 148.

[41] Ibid., p. 313.

Biblical nakedness functions as a boundary marker between sin and virtue, the human and divine, the living and the dead. As Job declared, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart' (Job 1:21). The manifest simplicity of Job's statement requires us to understand Timon's nakedness as both a baptism and funeral rite – both lying beyond the cognitive capacity of the individual subject and thus appealing, at least temporally, to those who witness these rituals. An audience may not immediately read Timon's nakedness as a portent of his ambiguous death, but both the aggression of his rhetoric and the spectacle of his nakedness signal a violent revision of his identity. His nakedness, in particular, functions as a sign of dangerous, even wild, subversion.

Indeed, Timon's signalling envisages a trend of public nakedness that half a century after the play's first staging flourished among the early Quakers. The historian Kenneth Carroll wrote a summary of historical incidents of public nakedness, such as that involving James and Elizabeth Milner, who called themselves, like the Adamites of Bohemia, Adam and Eve. Carroll provides many other examples of men and women walking naked through the streets and preaching naked in the marketplace. Carroll describes a widespread practice of sacred, public nakedness.[42] George Fox described one such naked signaller, William Simpson, as 'a walking sermon' who, as a sign to Oliver Cromwell and his Parliament, showed 'how God would strip them of their power, and that they should be as Naked as he was'.[43] Fox's description of Simpson is contained in a biographical pamphlet in celebration of his life. It concludes with a short polemic written by Simpson himself against the Church of England, titled 'Going Naked as a Signe':

> Oppression and cruelty hath been as a staff for thee, but the Lord is arisen to break thy Staff of Oppression, and thou shalt be left naked, […] Howl and

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[42] Kenneth L. Carroll, 'Early Quakers and "Going Naked as a Sign"', *Quaker History*, 67.2 (1978), 69–87 (p. 76).

[43] William Fortescue and others, *A Short Relation Concerning the Life and Death of That Man of God, and Faithful Minister of Jesus Christ, William Simpson* (London, 1671), p. 13.

> weep ye Teachers, […] ye Marchants of *Babylon:* All your Scarlet colour the Lord our God is coming to take off: Then your Nakedness shall appear to many Nations, […] Oh howl and weep![44]

Timon's soliloquy and Simpson's attack on the Church of England, while separated by half a century, are alike in their vitriol and symbolism. They are, however, materially different in their objectives. Simpson's ire is directed towards the false representation of the church, the 'Marchants of *Babylon'* and the misdirection of its followers. Timon, as we have seen, reveals a hatred towards 'the whole race of mankind, high and low!' (4.1.40). But the particular symbolism of nakedness, not as a pure state but rather as revealing the creature as created is, in both texts, a powerful political symbol against the artifice of authority, and in this way, it is perhaps an iteration of Isaiah's nakedness, which functioned 'as a sign and wonder upon Egypt, and Ethiopia' (Isa. 20:3).

Timon's nakedness also draws on the figure of the 'wild man' who 'challenges the integrity of a definitive boundary between humanity and animals'.[45] Hayden White's contention that early modern writers invited their readers to consider the notion of the 'wild man' and 'identify the artificiality in themselves, to recognize the extent to which their superficial "civilisation" masks a deeper "barbarism"'.[46] Timon's nakedness is partly, therefore, an articulation of White's assertion. The audience witness the fragility of civilisation's mask. The threat that this soliloquy presents, and what takes it beyond the introspection that White suggests, is that authority and its apparatus are acquired and constructed, not divinely bestowed, which makes them vulnerable to reversal.

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[44] William Fortescue and others, p. 13.

[45] Hassan Melehy, *The Poetics of Literary Transfer in Early Modern France and England* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), p. 248.

[46] Hayden White, 'The Forms of Wildness: Archaeology of an Idea.', in *The Wild Man Within: An Image of Western Thought from the Renaissance to Romanticism.*, ed. by Edward Dudley and Maximillian Novak (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972), pp. 3–38 (p. 32).

V.   Men, Wild Men and Beasts

Act Four, Scene Three takes place in the woods. According to Jowett, Timon is 'half naked' and carrying a spade.[47] As the scene progresses, we learn that Timon's wood, along with a habitable cave, are on the 'beached verge of the salt flood' (5.2.101). The loci of wood, cave and coastline place Timon in a series of limens: the wood divides the city and the wilds beyond; the cave returns Timon to a primitive state between animal and man, the living and the dead; and the coast is the boundary of land and sea, 'full of instability and crisis'.[48]

Julia Lupton suggests that the geographical limens, on the boundary between the city and the wilderness, echo the literary boundaries 'at the shifting shoreline where revelation surges into poetry and the Bible breaks into literature.'[49] Wood, cave and coastline return Timon to an untamed natural world which, like his body, is stripped of the vestments of civilization. For Lupton, Job has broken into the text and his torment provides a pattern for Timon's. Lupton's situating of *Timon* on the edges of literary form, pounded by the waves of intertextuality, provides an invitation and authority to the reading of other biblical influences.

Shakespeare frequently employed the forest as a location of transgression and shape-shifting, most memorably in *As You Like It* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* a place in which behaviour and location were equally removed from whatever constituted civilisation. For Timon, the wood functions as an initial step into wilderness, beyond the reach of Athenian law. Timon's cave is a refuge like the cave of Adullam, in which David hides from King Saul; a tomb and gateway like the cave of Machpelah, in which Abraham, Jacob and Isaac were buried, along with their wives Sarah, Rebecca and Leah and which is considered in Jewish biblical tradition as the gateway to the Garden of Eden. Indeed, Timon has the

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[47] Shakespeare, *Timon of Athens*, ed. by Middleton, and others, p. 265.
[48] Steve Mentz, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*, Shakespeare Now! (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 92.
[49] Lupton, p. 133.

chance to emulate David, drawing to him 'everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul' and some, such as Alcibiades, fulfil this brief, but Timon is not God's appointed (1 Sam 22:2). David's certainty that 'When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way' is perverted in Timon's hope that 'as Timon grows, his hate may grow / To the whole race of mankind, high and low!' (4.1.39-40).

Returning to the allusion to the narrative of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot and his daughters fled to the mountains and 'dwelt in a cave' (Gen. 19:30). They did this despite God's promise that they would be safe in the town of Zoar. In biblio-literary terms, Lot's cave is a more suitable locus of death, despair and renewal. The cave appears frequently as a shared locus across biblical (as we have seen) and early modern texts: the Cave of Quiet in Francis Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607); the Cave of Mammon in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610); and perhaps the cave that relates most closely to Timon's and Lot's, the Cave of Despair in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590), a place where a personified hopelessness resides, and attempts to draw the knight, Redcross, to suicide.

For Lot and his daughters, their place of retreat has revealed itself as a trap in which a more intimate sin resides as an inescapably interior depravity. Lot's sin finds a host (and useful scapegoat) in his daughters, who 'make him drink wine […] and lie with him' (Gen 19.34). Their sin is of the flesh. Timon, on the other hand, without the convenience of a daughter to blame, must embody his sin alone. Its imagery is that of an infection or plague. The cave and wood for Timon is, as Tom MacFaul puts it, 'the wild rural world […] an arena for angry contemplation of the failings of homosocial bonding and society in general.'[50] MacFaul's use of the word 'arena' suggests the performative nature of Timon's rage. As well

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[50] Tom MacFaul, *Shakespeare and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 64.

as bringing the sins of the city, he has brought its pageant *shew*. The liminality of the wood, cave and seashore allows him to remain between life and death. Perhaps what we start to witness is the dissolution of man or at least Timon's desire for the world's fetid destruction:

> O blessed breeding sun, draw from the earth
> Rotten humidity, below thy sister's orb
> Infect the air!   (4.3.1-3)

It reveals the scope of his curse, which was initially focused on Athens, but now spreads, plague-like, beyond the city walls. His request, if answered, would obliterate all life beneath the moon. What began as revenge has morphed into nihilism.

Timon suggests that humans are entirely composed of falsehood and sin, that 'All's obliquy, / There's nothing level in our cursed natures / But direct villainy' (4.3.18-20). In this sense, Timon is reawakening the curse which was introduced by the Original Sin. Timon seems to levitate beyond himself, regarding 'His semblable' in the third person and disdaining its appearance as a symbol of falsehood, before delving into the interiority of 'himself' (4.3.22). He concludes this series of thoughts with yet another imprecation on mankind and then a command to the earth, 'Destruction fang mankind! Earth, yield me roots' (4.3.23). These two short sentences seem to be in opposition: the first calling for annihilation, the second for sustenance. It seems unlikely that Timon is differentiating himself from 'mankind' after his continued efforts to demonstrate a wish to share in the world's destruction. Diane Purkiss suggests that Timon's rooting is a challenge to the system of land ownership, that Timon is defiantly opting out of this underpinning principle of capitalism. Purkiss describes the bounty of foraging as 'appealingly apocalyptic, a promissory note of a new heaven and a new earth' which is 'utopian and presocial'.[51] Purkiss draws on the current of defiance which runs through Timon's actions in the latter part of the play, actions which

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[51] Diane Purkiss, 'The Masque of Food: Staging and Banqueting in Shakespeare's England', *Shakespeare Studies*, 42 (2014), p. 98.

appear as self-flagellation yet contain a promise of freedom. It is perhaps here that the argument for Timon's *cupio* begins to rest on firmer ground, where his wish for destruction meets an implicit aspiration for liberty.

As Timon begins to dig, he strips away another layer of Athenian civility, becoming a child playing in the dirt, a pig or a 'beggar's dog' (4.3.354-5). Indeed, for the literary critic Caroline Spurgeon, the dog is the 'central image' of the play. She describes, in broad terms, the role of the dog in Elizabethan times 'at table, licking the hands of guests, fawning and begging for sweetmeats'.[52] We may readily perceive Timon's toadying court in this description, but perhaps Timon himself has moments of caninity; his gift-giving functioning as the wagging retrieval of game, his loyalty spurned. The metaphor seems to operate in both directions and invites us to reconsider assumptions regarding the balance and interplay of power. This double meaning is also true of Timon's request for roots, which in a literal sense pertains to sustenance, but offers several figurative options: first, as a sense of place and stability, it is also, as Lupton says, 'an origin, a *radix* (Latin) and a *Rhiza* (Greek) with the power to generate new growth'.[53] This reading responds well to Lupton's comparison with Job, in which nature's regenerative power is revealed in the hope that lies in the old roots and dead stump of a fallen tree to 'sprout again', although the same optimism does not apply to human renewal (Job 14.7). The symbolic potency of the root is better understood as connoting a truth, perhaps divine, that lies buried and waiting to send forth its green shoots.

But, in what feels more like a trial than a gift, Timon finds gold in the place of roots. The simple construction of his language, 'Gold? Yellow, glittering, precious gold?', is part of his rejection of the complexity and artifice that belongs to the human and adult worlds (4.3.26). It is a rejection of the type of pageantry of Athens. He rejects the earth's offer/test,

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[52] Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery: And What It Tells Us* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), p. 197-8.
[53] Lupton, p. 155.

declaring to the 'clear heavens' that he is 'no idle votarist', perhaps playing on the double sound of idle / idol. (4.3.27) Howard Felperin observes that 'Timon seems to have learned […] that gold, outside of fallen society, is unnatural and useless to man.'[54] It is the currency of the fallen.

Timon observes the transformational power of gold and articulates it as a litany, much like his imprecation of Act Four, Scene One. He indicates, perhaps holds, a small ingot of gold:

> Thus much of this will make
> Black white, foul fair, wrong right,
> Base noble, old young, coward valiant.
> […]
> Make the hoar leprosy adored, place thieves
> And give them title, knee and approbation
> With senators on the bench.
>
> (4.3.28-48)

This passage serves as a continuation to Timon's earlier imprecation for Athens to return to its 'confounding contraries' (4.1.20). They speak of transformation: in the first speech, a transformation from the artifice of *shew* to the true base reality; in the second, the process by which gold turns that reality into something that at least appears finer. Its allusion to alchemy is evident.

These transformations are a destabilising challenge to the political and social order, which is immediately embodied by the arrival of a small band of soldiers and prostitutes, led by Alcibiades. Their sudden appearance reiterates the alchemical allusion: the gold has drawn out the dross of humanity. Alcibiades fails to recognise Timon and rather than asking 'who', he asks, 'what art thou there?' and commands him to 'Speak' (4.3.49). Timon takes up the invitation, saying, 'A beast, as thou art' (4.3.50). This is an explicit articulation of 'beast in man', an idea that has attracted the critical attention of George Coffin Taylor, who regarded

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[54] Howard Falperin, *Shakespearean Romance* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 130.

Timon of Athens as the work in which this idea 'swells to its greatest volume'.[55] Taylor's work is in response to Theodore Spencer's influential book *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (1943), in which the author argues that 'Timon's mind continually dwells on the animals; on man's resemblance to them and on his inferiority to them'.[56] There is a danger here in simplifying Timon's use of beasts - wolves, bears, tigers, dragons, and the ubiquitous dogs - to a formula which elevates them beyond the human. It is perhaps more accurate to describe the complex symbolic meanings that are being employed. Timon has adjured the earth to 'infect the air!' (4.3.3), consigning all life to extinction. If animal life does remain, it is unlikely to be Edenic, but rather a vision of anarchy, in which the predators (and the play only mentions such animals) perform their visceral pleasures. It could be that Timon's wish to see the walls of Athens 'dive in the earth' (4.1.117) would release the city's human beasts and, like a disease, their destruction would spread inexorably.

The 'cruelty' of society's civic and legal structures is used as a model for the war that Alcibiades will bring to Athens. Phrynia and Timandra, the prostitutes that accompany Alcibiades, perform the same diffused destructive function in the form of venereal disease. The presence of Phrynia and Timandra allows for this theme to be fully explored through a series of vivid allusions. Timon encourages the prostitutes to weaponise their sex against the men of Athens, to 'Give them disease' and prepare them 'For tubs and baths', an early modern treatment for syphilis (4.3.83-6). He talks of the symptoms of syphilis: hair loss, whitening of the complexion, the rotting of lips and collapse of the nose. There is a gleefulness in his anticipation of these maladies befalling the Athenian people. He cheers the prostitutes: 'Down with the nose, / Down with it flat' (4.3.156-7).

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[55] See George Coffin Taylor, 'Shakespeare's Use of the Idea of the Beast in Man', *Studies in Philology*, 42.3 (1945), 530–43 (p. 356).

[56] Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1943), p. 182.

The curse of venereal disease works in three ways: to physically weaken, expose and destroy the people of Athens. Perhaps Timon's main hope for the spread of venereal disease is its very public display of symptoms, coupled with the disease's association with sexual promiscuity and sin. The conditions that Timon describes focus on appearance rather than the hidden pain of aching bones and joints. To encounter the symptoms of syphilis is to know something of the most intimate habits of the victim, and so when Timon directs the prostitutes to 'Hoar the flamen / That scolds against the quality of flesh', he is anticipating the exposure of the priest's sinfulness and hypocrisy (4.3.154-55). Ultimately, Timon hopes that venereal disease will function as a second invading army. It will deliver death through the effects of the disease on the sufferer but also on society's reproductive capabilities. The prostitutes' 'activity may defeat and quell / The source of all erection', leaving the men of Athens impotent (4.3.161-2). This cursing sequence concludes with a verbal gesture that implicates the prostitutes in their own destruction:

> Do you damn others and let this damn you,
> And ditches grave you all!
>
> (4.3.164-5)

There is a more hidden interpretation to Timon's allusion to syphilis in the disease's association with the 'new world' explicitly so in Girolamo Fracastoro's poem 'Syyphilis sive Morbus Gallicus' (1530). The poem describes how the disease 'From the Western climes 'twas wafted o'er / When daring Spaniards left their native shore.' (1.34-35).[57] Timon is summoning the destructive power of this 'new world' disease to destroy the old world, typified in Western thought by Athens. In this way, Timon's imprecations, which often appear nihilistic, are, in fact, concerned with renewal. They are an expression of the *cupio*

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[57] Geoffrey Eatough, *Fracastoro's Syphilis. Introduction, Text, Translation and Notes*, (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1984); For a discussion of the relationship between 'newness' and syphilis, see *(Po)X Marks the Spot: How to 'Read' 'Early Modern' 'Syphilis' in The Three Ladies of London* by Jonathan Gil Harris in *Sins of the Flesh: Responding to Sexual Disease in Early Modern Europe*, (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies), 2005), pp. 109-130.

dissolvi theme. For Timon, there is a new world, perhaps everlasting, waiting to replace the 'false' world that he is 'sick of' (4.3.371). Timon commands himself to prepare his burial place where 'the light foam of the sea may beat / Thy gravestone daily' (4.3.374-5). I agree with Nicholas Grene's description of the line's 'lyrical tenderness' and his suggestion that Timon's 'sea-washed body' brings to mind the sea's capacity to wash away sin, like Macbeth's hope that 'great Neptune's ocean [will] wash this blood / Clean from my hand' (2.2.78-9). [58] The implacable rhythm of the tide also functions as a natural clock, reiterating that time without Timon will continue to pass.

VI. Oblivion

Timon's focus turns towards his recently discovered gold, which he accuses of regicide, familial and matrimonial conflict, and lechery. He suggests that the chaos and conflict that gold creates will yield the world to beasts, either by the destruction of humankind or by their descent into brutishness. Once again, the appearance of gold draws out a second band of 'rascals', this time a group of thieves (4.3.423). This is the second of three groups to visit Timon. Their appearance is unlike that of the soldiers and prostitutes that accompany Alcibiades, who discover Timon by chance. The Thieves seem to have knowledge of Timon's gold, suggesting that this gossip has travelled back to Athens. This is confirmed later with the arrival of the Painter and the Poet, who speak about the gold that Timon has given to Timandra and Phrynia. This second group offers Timon, like the prostitutes, a source of social destruction. He tasks them to 'Rob one another […] Cut throats […] Break open shops' (4.3.440-2). Timon's objective appears to be another attack on the financial system of Athens.

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[58] Nicholas Grene, *Shakespeare's Tragic Imagination* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2016), p. 92

The final visitors to Timon's hermitage are two members of the Athenian senate. Fearing attack from Alcibiades and his army, they seek Timon's return to Athens, along with his rumoured gold, and offer him the Captaincy of the city. The scene is rich in biblical allusion, drawing on numerous themes from the Psalms, Matthew and Acts. These images reinforce earlier biblical allusions to develop an image of Athens lurching towards its destruction, and Timon urging it on.

The senators develop an image of Athens besieged by a wildness from beyond its walls, led by Alcibiades, the savage boar, who threatens to 'root up his country's peace' (5.2.50). The image of Alcibiades as a rooting boar returns us to Timon's digging in Act Four, Scene Three. Both Timon and Alcibiades are imagined as telluric entities, not just *on* earth but part of it. The senators' plea to Timon functions as a prologue to Psalm 80:

> Why have you broken down its walls
> so that all who pass by pick its grapes?
> Boars from the forest ravage it,
> and insects from the fields feed on it.
> Return to us, God Almighty!
> Look down from heaven and see!
> Watch over this vine,
> the root your right hand has planted,
> the son you have raised up for yourself.
>
> (Ps. 80:11-15)

Timon's reply is that if his countrymen are killed, the city sacked, its virgins assaulted, and the 'goodly aged men' are taken by their beards that he 'cares not' (5.2.62). Timon's fantasy of Athens' destruction, its visceral detail, may suggest an implacable animosity, or perhaps the imagined brutality of Athens' future is a rhetorical device that demonstrates Timon's nihilism. His self-destructive longings, which are articulated immediately thereafter, have none of the aggression. They are meditative and casual and yet arresting enough to delay the withdrawal of the senators:

> Why, I was writing my epitaph;
> It will be seen tomorrow.
>
> (5.2.70-1)

The delivery of Timon's suicidal intention is a rhetorical masterstroke; even its timeframe,

delivered as a passing thought. Timon will continue to author his narrative through the

anticipated performance of his epitaph. He goes on to say:

> My long sickness
> Of health and living now begins to mend
> And nothing brings me all things.
> (5.2.71-3)

This is the most explicit articulation of Timon's longing to die, his *cupio dissolvi* moment.

Life is seen paradoxically as a sickness to be endured, the recovery from which is death itself.

This scene lifts Bradbrook's analysis to lyrical heights in which she busily draws together

images of Timon's 'ocean grave', imagined through the epic scale of a sketched sonnet by

Keats, 'the moving waters at their priestlike task of pure ablution' with the astronomical,

humoral, mythical and biblical. [59] Bradbrook points to II Corinthians:

> As unknown, and yet known: as dying, and behold, we live, as chastened, and yet not
> killed: As sorrowing, and yet always rejoicing: as poor, and yet making many rich: as
> having nothing, and yet possessing all things.
> (2 Cor 6:9-10)

Timon's oblivion will bring him 'all things' and those that he bids 'Go, live still' will

continue to suffer the sickness of life (5.2.73). Indeed, the only support that Timon offers his

countrymen is in providing the branches of his tree as gallows for their suicide:

> To stop affliction, let him take his haste,
> Come hither ere my tree hath felt the axe
> And hang himself. (5.2. 95-7)

Timon's tree is a perversion of the biblical tree of life and a symbol of the paradox of life in

death. The bible references Judas's death in Matthew and Acts, but does not mention the tree.

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[59] M.C. Bradbrook, p. 24.

Matthew says simply that Judas 'departed, and went, and hanged himself', whereas Luke describes Judas' suicide as a throwing down, following which he 'brast asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out' (Matt. 27:5 and Acts 1:18). It seems that the tree motif was established later, but certainly by the fifth century, when this ivory panel was produced:

Figure 10. Ivory Panel, c. 420-430 AD

This late Roman panel depicts Judas (left) hanging from a tree with his purse of silver pieces at his feet; to his right are the Virgin Mary, St John and the crucified Christ; to Christ's right stands a Roman soldier. The field in which Judas dies later became known as Akeldama, the Field of Blood. It seems most likely that, in the absence of man-made structures, a tree would be required for both hanging and perhaps for Luke's gory account of Judas throwing himself down with enough force to split his body open. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Berowne declares that 'Judas was hanged on the elder' (5.2.674), an idea echoed in Thomas Hayward's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*: 'Pray, pray, lest I live to see / Thee Judas-like hanged on an elder tree' (13.77-8).[60] Timon sees hanging as the most appropriate death for the citizens of Athens: the sin of self-slaughter melds to its method, challenging biblical law, 'for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on tree' (Gal .3:13).

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[60] *Women on the Early Modern Stage: A Woman Killed with Kindness, The Tamer Tamed, The Duchess of Malfi, The Witch of Edmonton*, ed. by Emma Smith and others, New Mermaids Anthologies (London: Methuen Drama, 2014).

Timon intends to fell the tree for his 'own use' (5.2.91), perhaps a phrase inherited from Plutarch, as Jowett suggests, or as timber for his epitaph, as proposed by Dawson and Minton.[61] These interpretations overlook the biblical symbolic function of Timon's tree felling, which is perhaps rooted in Ezekiel, Chapter 31. God commands Ezekiel to convey a parable of a great cedar tree, a metaphor for the destruction of Assyria, to the king of Egypt and his people. The cedar tree, known by some scholars as the Cosmic Tree, is described as being 'exalted above all the trees of the field, and his boughs were multiplied, and his branches were long, because of the multitude of the waters, which the deep sent out'. The panegyric continues with an account of the tree's majesty, but abruptly pivots towards God's rejection of the over-tall, over-beautiful cedar. The tree was so majestic that 'all the trees of Eden, that were in the garden of God, envied him'. For the cedar's hubris and 'wickedness', God delivers him to 'the mightiest among the heathen'. The Cosmic Tree is destroyed, its branches broken; 'all the people of the earth are departed from his shadow, and have forsaken him' (Ezekiel 31:5-12). Timon's tree emerges as a shared symbol of hubris and threatened destruction, conveyed like Timon's rumoured gold, which will serve as a warning to Athens.

The figure of the hanging tree, and an invitation for the senators to visit and make use of it, is followed by a reversal in which Timon commands those assembled to 'come not to me again' (5.2.99). The Timon show (*shew*) is over, the pageant is packing up and leaving for good. But, of course, the performance will continue in Timon's absence through the careful construction of his afterlives, his sea-shore grave and epitaphs. To these sites of pilgrimage, Timon invites the senators 'thither come, / And let my gravestone be your oracle' (5.2.103-4). In a process that mirrors the objective of Lucrece's suicide, which I will explore in the final chapter, Timon imagines a death in which he is freed from the 'sour words' of language to

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[61] William Shakespeare, *The Life of Timon of Athens*, ed. by John Jowett, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 189; William Shakespeare, Thomas Middleton, *Timon of Athens*, ed. by Tony Dawson and Gretchen E. Minton, (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2017), p. 173.

the simple sincerity of the image (5.2.105). This sequence of thought, like his sporadic

invitations, is rather confused by the written epitaphs that he leaves behind. It is perhaps a

conflict between Timon's misanthropy and the theatrical priority of words over images.

At this point, Timon's *cupio dissolvi* becomes unambiguous, drawing from the early

part of the phrase in which St Paul says, 'For me, to live is Christ; and to die is gain. [*Mihi*

enim vivere Christus est, et mori lucrum.]' (Phil. 1 :21). Timon's theology shares the Pauline

sentiment, declaring 'Graves only be men's works and death their gain'(5.2.107). This

position, that of the worthlessness of the temporal world, imbues much of Philippians,

resurfacing explicitly in the first chapter:

> Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of
> Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count
> them but dung, that I may win Christ.
>
> (Phil. 3:8)

Mark Chinca provides a useful footnote account of this sentiment's journey through Jerome

and Benard of Clairvaux and, perhaps exemplified by Bonaventure who urges:

> O soul, if at times worldly joys, the false prestige of this world, or its brief and fragile
> power delight you, at that point call to mind all of [heaven] and you will reject all as
> dung.[62]

Timon's talk of death as gain, along with his earlier observation that 'the earth's a thief, /

That feeds and breeds by composture stol'n / From gen'ral excrement' (4.3.436-7) presents

him to an early modern audience as a Patristic echo, urging destruction and renewal. The last

words that Timon speaks are to command the sun to 'hide thy beams' (52.108). It is similar to

Job's curse on the day of his birth: 'neither let the light shine upon it. Let darkness and the

shadow of death stain it' (Job 3.4-5). He shares Job's destructive imagination but directs it

against himself and the whole world. His final imprecation is to return the earth to the

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[62] Mark Chinca, *Meditating Death in Medieval and Early Modern Devotional Writing: From Bonaventure to Luther* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 107.

darkness of pre-creation, when it was 'without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep' (Gen. 1:2). John Holloway suggests that the Sun here is Timon, as he is often figured throughout the play, and that his death has 'the inevitability of the sun's decline'.[63] The sun, however, is a symbol of both decline and renewal, a condition that requires us to consider in what way Timon's death will bring about a resurrection.

If we are to invoke the *Golden Bough*, as Holloway does, it should perhaps be directed towards Timon as a public scapegoat, as the embodiment or vehicle which draws evil influences 'from the people, village, or town.'[64] Timon as a scapegoat belongs to the biblical allusion that has been central to this analysis. The scapegoat figure emerges in Leviticus, taken from two sacrificial goats and allowed to escape with the burdens of sin on his head:

> And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness.
>
> (Lev. 16:21)

Through the figure of the scapegoat, we can understand Timon's powerlessness to direct the narrative. There is no indication that he regards Alcibiades as his successor or even himself as a leader, short of his reference to his 'reign' which, in the context of his misanthropy, strikes a cynical note (5.2.108).

For the Athenians, their impending destruction is shaped by biblical allusion. They perceive Alcibiades' approach as a 'fearful scouring'—both the lively progress of his troops and a means to 'cleanse' the city of their iniquity. This represents a 'fall' of biblical shape and

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[63] John Holloway, *The Story of the Night: Studies in Shakespeare's Major Tragedies* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 133.

[64] *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion* was written by James Frazer and published between 1906-1915. Frazer, a Scottish anthropologist, attempted to understand common aspects of religious belief and practice; James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, ed. by Robert Frazer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 170.

force (5.2.17). This passage shares and reverses some of the language of Psalm 124, in which God is praised for protecting the Israelites against destruction, as an escaped bird 'from the snare of the fowler' (Ps. 124:7). But the Athenian senators do not anticipate divine freeing from the snare of their enemy.

VII.   Afterlives

The final section explores how Shakespeare uses the ambiguity and show of Timon's death to communicate a message of destruction and renewal. Shakespeare provides us with the events that precede and follow Timon's death but omits the death itself; we are left to imagine his suicide. Did he hang himself on the tree that he offered to the Athenians for that purpose, did he die of starvation, or did he use some implement of the forest to end his life? Ophelia's death, like Timon's, occurs off-stage, but is revealed in poetic detail by Gertrude, who describes the buoyancy of Ophelia's clothing eventually yielding to the weight of water that it has absorbed and pulling her down 'to muddy death' (4.7.155). There is a body to be retrieved and contentiously buried. Nothing of Timon, in a corporeal sense, remains. He has even contrived to bury himself. His death is ambiguous and total. What does remain are two epitaphs, the first of which is spoken by the Soldier:

> Timon is dead, who hath outstretched his span,
> Some beast read this, there does not live a man.
>
> (5.4.3-4)

These lines, which return us to the dualism of man/beast that we have explored in the previous section, insinuate that humanity has descended into beastliness, allowing Timon's misanthropy a *post-mortem* life. They also reveal Timon's suicide, like Lucrece's, to be an act of authorial agency, a shaping of his personal narrative and symbolic value.

In my earlier account of the *cupio dissolvi* phrase and theme, I explored the differences between accepting and desiring death, partly illustrated by the subtle distinction between Simeon's *Nunc dimittis* [now let depart]*,* his contentedness to die, and the yearning of St Paul's desire to dissolve. Timon's death wish occupies a space somewhere between the two: he does not articulate a yearning for *unio mystica* [divine union] but neither is he passive in his desire to die. His active longing is for universal annihilation, a biblical 'scouring' that will strip the world of its mendacity (5.3.15).

In the final scene of the play, the biblical parallel that Shakespeare has adopted is presented with renewed clarity and follows the architecture and imagery of biblical apocalypse narratives. These have hitherto involved the Great Flood, the suffering of Job in what might be called his personal apocalypse, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In this final section of the play, the biblical parallel shifts to the Book of Revelation. Through this text, several shared ideas of man's descent and judgment are lashed together. Man's beastliness, one of Timon's favoured insults, mirrors the beast of Revelation 13, the antichrist. The beast figure of Revelation is an allegory connoting sexual licentiousness - goat-headed and ridden by the Whore of Babylon - and corrupt political power. Shakespeare's drawing on the notion of man as beast belongs to a richer history than merely the descent of man, especially when the image is presented in the context of an immoral culture's imminent destruction. If we accept that such a parallel may be operating, we might allow early modern thinking on the Beast of Revelation to illuminate our understanding of the beast image in *Timon of Athens*.

Laura Lunger Knoppers, writing about Durer's 1498 woodcut series *Apocalyse,* in which he depicted the scene of Revelation 13, suggests that 'female and bestial bodies emblematise the corruption of pagan Rome, which – in its literal form as a city – burns in the

upper right-hand corner of the engraving'.[65] It is an iteration of the apocalyptic vision that is

repeated throughout the Bible, perhaps most clearly imagined, at least in its afterlife as an

artistic image, in the narrative of Sodom and Gomorrah. Knopper's description of the

foreground of Durer's engraving could serve just as well for Timon's Athens:

> The foreground belongs to the monstrous and aberrant: the harlot, the false prophet
> (with a turban), and the gaping crowd that appears foolishly susceptible to the harlot's
> wiles.[66]

The harlot figure operates in a literal sense as a prostitute of Athens to return to the city and

spread venereal disease, but also figuratively, connoting the allurements of false idols.

Indeed, the strong parallel between Revelation and *Timon of Athens* rests on the notion of

deception. Revelation's mission is to reveal a hidden spiritual truth. Timon, along with his

city, has been duped into worshipping the false idol of riches and temporal power. Indeed,

Timon himself has been deified by his companions.

The Book of Revelation is presented as a message to the seven churches of Asia

Minor[67] and its warning to the church of Laodicea, and what that warning reveals of the

culture of the city, strongly resembles Athens:

> For thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and
> knowest not how thou art wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I
> counsel thee to buy of me gold tried by the fire, that thou mayest be made rich: and
> white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that thy filthy nakedness do not
> appear: and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I
> love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore and amend.
>
> (Rev. 3:17-19)

The allusion to alchemy, which resides in the frequent references to alchemical materials and

processes, the details of man's idolatrous affliction, and the call for repentance finds

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[65] *Monstrous Bodies/Political Monstrosities in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Laura Lunger Knoppers and Joan B. Landes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 104.
[66] Ibid., p. 104.
[67] The seven churches addressed in the Book of Revelation are: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

expression in *Timon of Athens*. God exposes Laodicea's temporal riches as a fallacy and reveals the city's wretched spiritual condition: miserable, poor, naked and blind – the condition that Timon returned to in the wilderness.

There is no real hope of repentance for the Athenians. The embassage of the city's senators, prostitutes and thieves was not to atone but to enrich themselves in various ways and Timon returns them the city to hasten its destruction. They are like the people of Revelation who:

> repented not of the works of their hands that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and of silver, and of brass, and of stone, and of wood, which neither can see, neither hear, nor go.
> (Rev. 9:20)

Alcibiades' entrance at the beginning of the final scene is heralded by trumpets, a military custom but also strongly resonant with the seven trumpets which proclaim the seven apocalyptic acts.

This chapter has explored the various and frequent influence of Christian narratives, especially the apocalypse narratives of the Old Testament, on *Timon of Athens.* It revealed how Timon's court was written as a type of pageant, supported by Bradbrook's definition of this theatrical form. From this locus of materialism and immorality, the reading drew on biblical parallels to demonstrate how Timon's fall and exile can be better understood as a salvific experience and one that, fuelled by a growing *contemptus mundi*, persuaded Timon to seek the destruction of Athens. Timon, as a symbol of Athens, is subsumed within his destructive imprecations.

Timon's desire for destruction is bitter and visceral, especially in contrast to Hamlet's struggle with the competing narratives of faith, philosophy and duty. Timon invokes, perhaps embodies, an Old Testament retribution which is so hot and vengeful that it obscures any subsequent renewal. At the end of the play, Alcibiades reads Timon's epitaph and 'translates

his friend's misanthropy into politics'[68] by harnessing forgiveness, absolving the city of its sins. Jowett explains that 'There will be no Apocalypse; neither will there be the establishment of the heavenly city […] This is still, inevitably, an Iron Age ruled by money, law, and the sword.'[69] Jowett's observation reveals the impotence of Timon's imprecations and his failed desire for a destructive renewal. But the civil society that Jowett describes, of the economy, law and order overlooks the subtler transformation of forgiveness. Timon's grave becomes the symbolic locus of this forgiveness, washed of its faults by the weeping of 'vast Neptune' (5.5.76). The *cupio dissolvi* that emerges in *Timon of Athen*s is not of cataclysmic destruction and renewal but an acceptance and forgiveness of human faults.

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[68] Joan Pong Linton, 'Charisma and the Making of the Misanthrope in Timon of Athens', in *Enchantment and Dis-Enchantment in Shakespeare and Early Modern Drama: Wonder, the Sacred, and the Supernatural*, ed. by Nandini Das and Nick Davis (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 129.

[69] William Shakespeare and others, *The Life of Timon of Athens*, ed. by John Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 88.

ROMEO AND JULIET'S *VIA MYSTICA*

I.   Stations of the *via mystica*

This chapter attempts to interrogate the pattern of destructive renewal in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. It reads Romeo and Juliet's suicides in the context of early modern Christian practice and belief, specifically notions of sanctity, idolatry, pilgrimage and mysticism. As with previous chapters, I continue to use the paradigm of *cupio dissolvi* as an organising principle, rather than an assertion of any explicit link between the phrase and Shakespeare's text. The chapter responds to the concern of the thesis that, as Debora Shuger claims 'religion during this period provides the primary language of analysis'[1] and more specifically to a *cupio* paradigm concerning a sacred aspiration towards an eternal union. I demonstrate that *Romeo and Juliet* is a revised articulation of that paradigm and the central characters' self-destructive deaths, and the mimetic deaths that lead to them, transfigure time, resulting in a type of mystical triumph over mutability.

Jill Levenson describes *Romeo and Juliet* as a hologram, from one angle 'a love-story which transcends time and place', from another, a story 'shaped by the social and literary conventions of late sixteenth-century England', and, in the wake of modern psychology, an explication of 'change rather than absolutes'.[2] Levenson's description accounts for the play's popular and critical reception, as an exemplum of self-sacrificing romantic love and its bridging of medieval, early modern and contemporary theological, philosophical and literary cultures. The hologram is an elegant way to appreciate the scope and influence of the text but, however convincing the hologrammatic illusion, each facet remains separate. Perhaps *Romeo*

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[1] Debora Kuller Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics, and the Dominant Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), p. 6.

[2] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Jill L. Levenson, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 1.

and Juliet is better understood, particularly for the purposes of this chapter, as the convergence of three pathways: its cultural legacy, historical particularity and conceptual latitude. The pathway is directed, so to speak, by medieval and early modern Christian cultures of worship, expressed through pilgrimage, sanctity and mysticism. The play is a product of a Christian culture, a culture refashioned by Shakespeare to provide agency, dramatic power and triumph to its young protagonists. Romeo and Juliet's love follows a pattern of mystical devotion that is experienced and developed at each key moment of their relationship, along a secularised *via mystica* - a journey of purgation, illumination and union. It is a journey of iterative destruction towards an ultimate resurrection, and if their union through destruction is desired, as I argue it is, they are articulating a secularised *cupio dissolvi*.

The central focus of this chapter takes the form of a close and extended reading of key scenes. These moments are considered within the context of Christian pilgrimage, what I believe to be the central motif of the play. Each moment functions as a 'station' whereby Romeo and Juliet experience a secularised mystical union in what becomes an iterative progress towards their desired destination, a union that exists beyond 'the prison of the body […] released from its fetters into liberty.'[3] The 'stations' are as follows: Romeo's renunciation of his name, their marriage, sexual union, their mimetic deaths and their *actual* deaths. In all stages or steps of the *via mystica*, Romeo and Juliet's *cupio dissolvi* is focused on self-abnegation. It parallels Christian mystical practices in which 'only the person who had cleared this inner space and had achieved "divine nothingness" could become an empty vessel that would subsequently be filled by the godhead'.[4] Before I begin with these

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[3] Philo, *Who Is the Heir?* LXVIII, p. 317 in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. by Amy M. Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 254.

[4] Julius Rubin, 'Melancholy', in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion*, ed. by John Corrigan, 1st edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 290–309 (p. 298).

moments, I will provide an outline of Christian mysticism and its place in early modern literature. This summary makes available the working vocabulary of the chapter, a brief insight into some of the mystical texts that are referenced and an appreciation of the challenges of this analysis. It also attempts to explain the paucity of academic engagement with mysticism in Shakespeare.

The OED reveals a complex development of words relating to mystical belief and practice. 'Mystic' was recorded in English during the fourteenth century and retained its Hellenistic connotation as a 'symbolic or allegorical representation'.[5] This particular branch of meaning may provide a significant insight into its ambiguity, as a *representation* rather than a thing itself. 'Mysticism' appears to have entered the English language much later, in the eighteenth century, and is 'frequently derogatory […] characterised by vague, obscure or confused spirituality'.[6] There are several related words and numerous definitions, which perhaps demonstrate the confusion and suspicion that mystical theology aroused throughout the English renaissance and beyond. The passing of time has failed to deliver any clarity. According to Julia Lamm, mysticism remains 'inherently elusive and pluriform', finding meaning through the parallels of diverse religious experience.[7]

This chapter is only concerned with *Christian* mysticism, which Bernard McGinn defines as:

> belief and practice that concerns the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the effect of what the mystics themselves have described as a direct and transformative presence of God.[8]

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[5] 'mystic', in *OED Online*. September 2021. Oxford University Press.
[6] 'mysticism', in *OED Online*. September 2021. Oxford University Press.
[7] *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. by Julia A. Lamm (Hoboken: J. Wiley, 2013), p. 2.
[8] McGinn, Essential Writings of Christian Mystics, p. xiv.

This definition could describe a range of religious experience, but McGinn does offer two particularly useful characteristics: that a mystical connection with God must be unmediated and transformative. This simple condition illustrates the paradigmatic contiguity between *cupio dissolvi* and mysticism; a desire to dissolve and be with Christ is revealed as an inherently mystical longing. A mystical experience cannot merely perpetuate or bolster an established position of faith, nor can it be accessed through an intermediary. McGinn's definition springs from Western Christian theology, but as my exploration of *Romeo and Juliet* utilises the power and emotion that underlies mystical infatuation, I have drawn from diverse strands of Christianity - eastern, western, Protestant and Catholic – wherever this type of mysticism is most powerfully expressed.

At this point, we can recall the idea that the mystical is symbolic or allegorical and group it with McGinn's abbreviated explanation of a union that is unmediated and transformative. The central qualities of symbolism, directness and transformation, belong as much to mysticism as they do to literature. Romeo and Juliet are clearly transformed by the ecstasy of their love, which appears to find form, expression and direction in Christian devotional practices. The task is to project the mystical pattern of devotion and longing onto romantic love, generating unmediated and transformative secular imitations. Examples abound of the secular appropriation of sacred longing in Shakespeare, and specifically in *Romeo and Juliet*, but the *cupio dissolvi* theme requires this and the self-destruction in an attempt to reach what is desired. Romeo and Juliet's desire for a shared eternal union requires their individual end. This mystical longing, much like Augustine's vision at Ostia as analysed by Amy Hollywood, underscores the transient nature of the mystical experience. Hollywood notes that such ephemerality lies at the heart of mystical life, a feature vividly reflected in Romeo and Juliet's fleeting moments of union, which impel them towards their ultimate

sacrifice.[9] This interpretation of Romeo and Juliet's mystical praxis, as iterative and fleeting, performs an important function in placing the play, at least before their deaths, within the *cataphatic* rather than *apophatic* mystical tradition, although these states are not mutually exclusive.

Christina Van Dyke provides a detailed account of this branching of mystical praxis; *apophatic* mysticism, she explains, focuses on the idea of an ineffable and unknowing union with God, or perhaps better still, 'the infinite'.[10] It is a *via negativa* of 'God ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible'.[11] The *cataphatic* tradition is an unmuted expression of mystical union in 'emotional, physical and sensory terms'.[12] It is, for example, the articulation of the blissful pain of St Teresa's ecstasy. Where drama explores passionate religious feelings, or those feelings that parallel and secularise them, a *cataphatic* articulation is required to invoke for an audience the subject of that obsession.

When Caroline Spurgeon wrote her influential book *Mysticism in English Literature* over a century ago, she asserted that 'mysticism underlies the thought of most of our great poets' but set Shakespeare aside, owing to mystical feeling being poorly suited to the dramatic form. Along with the suspicions that I referred to earlier, Spurgeon's view may have influenced the misdirection of a branch of scholarship concerning the play's categorisation and its success against that measure. The mid-twentieth century literary scholar, H. B. Charlton, regarded the play in the 'pattern of the idea of tragedy […] a failure'. Clifford Leach argues that 'it is the casualness of the play's cosmology that prevents us from seeing it

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[9] Hollywood, *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, p. 2.

[10] *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by Robert Pasnau and Christina van Dyke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 722.

[11] Liturgy of St John Chrysostom in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, ed. by Robert Pasnau and Christina van Dyke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 722.

[12] Ibid., p. 722.

as a tragedy fully achieved'.[13] Leach's point is that the apparent randomness of events prohibits the accumulation of tragedy. But this may be an interpretation that fails to understand the inherent triumph of their destruction. Through the Christian devotional perspective, *Romeo and Juliet* is not a tragedy but a triumph; temporally, over a failing, authoritarian gerontocracy and metaphysically, over death itself.

A more triumphant image of Romeo and Juliet's imagined afterlife is revealed in contradistinction to the gloomy view of some of Shakespeare's other characters. Hamlet's 'undiscovered country', at least for Hamlet, is to be feared (3.1.81); Othello sees himself 'damned beneath all depth in hell' (5.2.135), like Macbeth's 'deep damnation' (1.7.20); and David Bevington describes Gloucester's apostrophe, 'O ruined piece of nature! This great world / Shall so wear out to naught' (4.6.134-5), as likening Lear's death to the end of the world 'beyond which it is impossible to entertain a vision of any kind of afterlife'. Romeo and Juliet's afterlife, however, is an anticipated state of union.[14] Death for Romeo and Juliet offers a freedom which is unobtainable to them in the temporal world. It is a position which is supported by A. M. Kinghorn's assertion that:

> The Elizabethan and Jacobean poets welcomed death as a bringer of immortality and looked upon this life as amounting to a loss of which the final moments are only to be eagerly anticipated.[15]

The gateway to eternal freedom is death, but this overlooks Romeo and Juliet's attempts to find heaven on earth, experiences that I describe as *cataphatic*. A stronger case for

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[13] Clifford Leach, 'The Moral Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet' in *English Renaissance Drama: Essays in Honor of Madeleine Doran and Mark Eccles,* Standish Henning et al., eds. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), cited in D. Douglas Waters, *Christian Settings in Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Rutherford, [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), p. 125.

[14] David Bevington, '"Is This the Promised End?" Death and Dying in "King Lear"', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 133.3 (1989), 404–15 (p. 414).; William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works,* eds. Stanley Wells, and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[15] Kinghorn, A.M., 'Then Love - Devouring Death Do What He Dare: The Immeasurable Margin in Romeo and Juliet', *Bulletin of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 9, 1986, 21–35 (p. 29).

Shakespearean mysticism could have been made through an emphasis on the *cataphatic* by illuminating the similarities between the divine and the mortal. Another source that may have illuminated the mystical parallels of *Romeo and Juliet* is the *Song of Songs,* an erotic poem of the Ketuvim of the Hebrew Bible. The early Christian theologian Origen (c.185) describes the *Song of Songs* as a mystical drama. This category of literature combines the mystical concern of divine immanence with the form and conventions of the stage. *Romeo and Juliet* becomes an example of this genre, and through this lens Shakespeare's mystical allusions in the play may have been better understood as a symbolic triumph of transformation and unity.

Mysticism is operating within the cultural and symbolic milieu of *Romeo and Juliet* as a transformational and immanent union: the objects and emblems that occur in mysticism, such as the dart of love; a longing for union, either secularising or spiritualising; the abnegation of the temporal world. These mystical elements in Romeo and Juliet are the dominate features of Christian mystical works, especially the epic biblical poem *The Song of Songs* and the *Four Degrees of Violent Charity* by Richard of St Victor (d.1173), in which Richard describes a mystical love that resembles the mad passion of romantic infatuation. He writes that 'The soul loves that one, desires it, thirsts for it, yearns after it'.[16] Love is destabilising, even tyrannous; whereby the human soul forgets 'all exterior things, does not even know itself'.[17] This is how we first encounter Romeo, who laments, 'Tut, I have lost myself. I am not here. / This is not Romeo, he's some otherwhere.' (1.1.195-6). His self-consuming desire for Rosaline, and later for Juliet, signals the start of a process of mortification, the first stage of which is establishing the disunity of body and soul, a division that Richard of St Victor recognises in man as a 'spiritual and corporeal entity'.[18] Romeo's

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[16] McGinn, p. 157.
[17] McGinn, p. 157.
[18] Ritva Palmén, *Richard of St. Victor's Theory of Imagination*, Investigating Medieval Philosophy, volume 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), p. 53.

desire develops a self-abnegation which manifests in the rejection of his name, family and, ultimately, his life. It is a pattern that Juliet follows, through marriage, sexual union and death. Juliet and Romeo are pursuing their dissolution.

The middle section of the analysis looks at Romeo and Juliet's sexual union, or at least the arrangements of their assignation, and the close parallels to the mystical poem *Dark Night of the Soul* and the book-length commentaries *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night*, written by John of the Cross (1542-1591). The poem describes the soul's clandestine flight towards the freedom of sacred union, aided by the cover of darkness, which performs the function as the anonymously conceived *Cloud of Unknowing,* obscuring the creator from its creature.

The aubade that follows Romeo and Juliet's sexual union bears noteworthy similarities to the 'epithalamium' of *The Song of Songs,* 'the most exegeted book of the bible' in medieval times, much of which was at the hands of mystical theologians.[19] I consider the text itself and a small part of this commentary in the works of Origen, Madame Guyon, and Bernard of Clairvaux. This leads to a discussion of Shakespeare's secularising sexuality or perhaps the mingling of secular desire with the sacred.

In the final sections, I consider Romeo and Juliet's mystical relationship with death, both mimetic and actual. Direct comparison gives way to a discussion of Shakespeare's exploration of time and mutability before turning to the final steps of the *via mystica*, the interplay of *cataphatic* and *apophatic* allusions and the *unio mystica* – the union of the soul – as the intersection of secular and sacred desire. Throughout Romeo and Juliet's mystical pilgrimage, they are pursuing, through self-abnegation, an immutable union in or with each other. Their desire is a *cupio dissolvi* for the secularised God of romantic union. By exploring

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[19] Louise Nelstrop, Kevin J. Magill, and Bradley B. Onishi, *Christian Mysticism: An Introduction to Contemporary Theoretical Approaches* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), p. 86.

the frequent allusion to mystical faith and practice in *Romeo and Juliet* we can begin to understand the play as an example of the Shakespearean utilisation of the sacred in service to the theatrical; a strategic appropriation of sacred infatuation that retains its force but is redirected towards the romantic.

II. False Idol

Although Rosaline is denied the opportunity to elevate beyond the flatness of a 'disembodied personification of the Petrarchan lady' and only exists in Romeo's exalted report, she performs an important role in understanding Romeo's spiritualising of romantic desire.[20] She has rebuffed his advances and sent him into a deep bout of lovesickness, seen weeping in the morning before returning to his chamber where he 'Shuts up his windows, locks fair daylight out / And makes an artificial night' (I.1.137-138). Rosaline is a product of Shakespeare's anterior texts, a phantom of Petrarch's Laura or yet more directly, as Spencer's Rosalind, an equally absent presence in the poem 'The Shepheardes Calender'.[21] Rosaline is an absent yet persistent presence in the play, invoked on several occasions as late as the second act, but never becoming more than a symbol of Romeo's misdirected desire; her chief functions being to introduce a Baroque form of spiritualised desire – an exuberant and dramatic expression of longing - and to become the false idol to Romeo's correctly directed love for Juliet.

In Romeo's first sighting of Juliet, he establishes the sacred metaphors that he will employ to describe her and his feelings towards her throughout the play, some of the same that he used when referring to Rosaline. Juliet is imagined as a 'holy shrine' (1.5.93), Romeo her 'pilgrim' and Rosaline as a 'devout religion' (1.2.91). Catherine Bates suggests

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[20] David Bevington, *Shakespeare the Seven Ages of Human Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), p. 74.

[21] Edmund Spenser and Richard A. McCabe, *The Shorter Poems* (London: Penguin Books, 1999).

that Romeo's veneration of Juliet is a reiteration of his desire for Rosaline, taken from the

same playbook. Of Rosaline, Romeo laments:

> She will not stay the siege of loving terms,
> Nor bide th' encounter of assailing eyes,
> Nor ope her lap to saint-seducing gold.

(1.1.210-212)

Even the promise of rich gifts falls short of Rosaline's interest; she will not allow herself to

be overcome. Bates suggests that, once Romeo has abandoned his interest in Rosaline, his

infatuation for her seems 'nothing but idolatry'.[22] Romeo certainly reveres Rosaline's beauty,

regarding it a 'huge waste' that she will remain chaste (1.1.216). His late infatuation for

Rosaline and his early interest in Juliet overlap and blur. But with Rosaline, Romeo is more

the holy crusader than a devout palmer, eager to besiege and conquer her. The last line

combines this metaphor: a barricaded castle door with the innuendo 'ope her lap' punning on

the double-meaning of lap.[23] This passage is markedly more cynical than his wooing of

Juliet. It invokes a world where the words, 'loving terms', are weapons and rapacious saints

are tempted by earthly riches.

His desire for Rosaline is carnal, cloaked in the lofty language of devotion but giving

way to aggressive siege metaphors. He covets her sexually and laments that her beauty will

be 'cut off from all posterity' (1.1.218). Juliet's beauty, on the other hand, is 'too rich for use,

for earth too dear' (1.5.44). Rosaline is a telluric and temporal article, an emblem of *memento*

mori, her ephemeral beauty functioning as a declaration of mutability. The source of

Rosaline's value is her capacity to conceive a child, and this is her only means of defying

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[22] Catherine Bates, 'Shakespeare's Tragedies of Love', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, ed. by Claire McEachern, 1st edn (Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 182–203 (p. 200).
[23] Alison Findlay, *Women in Shakespeare: A Dictionary*, (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2014), p. 230.

time. This is set against Juliet's celestial permanence, a beauty that transcends time and so has no requirement to renew through procreation. Romeo's veneration of Juliet requires her elevation to Goddess status to avoid idolatry but, Christ-like, she is both spiritual and corporeal, a meeting of heaven and earth.

Shakespeare allows Romeo and Juliet to express their love in idolatrous terms. Juliet explicitly names Romeo her idol, which, despite the Catholic setting of the play and its many sources, may seem surprising in the context of post-Reformation England, in which idolatry and the associated 'cult of saints', and the granting of indulgences was increasingly viewed with suspicion. It is worth recalling the position taken by Shakespeare's main source, Arthur Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet* (1562), which includes the explicitly anti-Catholic foreword to the reader:

> a couple of unfortunate lovers, thralling themselves to unhonest desire; neglecting the authority and advice of parents and friends; conferring their principal counsels with drunken gossips and superstitious friars (the naturally fit instruments of unchastity); attempting all adventures of peril for th' attaining of their wished lust; using auricular confession the key of whoredom and treason, for furtherance of their purpose.[24]

Brooke presents *Romeus and Juliet* as a warning of the consequences of evil. The shape of the wickedness that Brooke describes seems to be primarily concerned with the appropriateness of those chosen for counsel: Juliet's 'drunken' nurse and the 'superstitious' Friar. The anti-Catholic sentiment is yet more explicit in his vitriolic reference to 'auricular confession'.

Robert Swanson provides a fascinating account of late medieval indulgences, arguing that 'a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins', revealing a dark

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[24] Arthur Brooke, *Brooke's 'Romeus and Juliet' Being the Original of Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet'*, ed. by John James Munro (London: Chatto & Windus, 1908).

economy of a scale that naturally attracts a good deal of corruption and fraud.[25] Swanson is careful not to overstate corruption, but the perception of embezzlement and the wariness towards travelling pardoners surely fed into the mindset of the Protestant reformers and those that would be sympathetic to their teachings. Shakespeare casts Romeo within this pilgrim culture, seeking the indulgence of Juliet. Robert Bartlett outlines Martin Luther's opposition to indulgences, and by extension the pilgrimages that were often required to receive them. He highlights how Luther, in his *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* (1517), considered the 'grant of an indulgence for visiting a particular church […] absurd.'[26] It is from this culture of Protestant suspicion that Romeo is drawn. His romantic language intersects with the Catholic language of the culture of pilgrimage and its associations with idolatry and indulgencies.

Romeo's idolising of Rosaline also reflects the contiguity of idolatry and sexual sin as described in 1 Corinthians 10, where Paul warns against the dangers of temptation. He directs the reader to Exodus 32, which details Aaron's construction of the golden calf and altar. The Israelites made their offerings to the golden calf; they ate, drank and 'sinned sexually'.[27] Romeo's idolising of Rosaline, with his desire to assail her and 'ope her lap', connotes the sexual sin and promiscuity of the wandering pilgrim. The cultural trope of the wandering, licentious pilgrim is a branch of mystical desire that, I believe, informs Romeo and Juliet's expression of love. It allows a contradistinction to be made between Romeo's lusty desire for Rosaline and his profound longing for Juliet, creating a binary between the ephemeral and the eternal.

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[25] R. N. Swanson, *Indulgences in Late Medieval England: Passports to Paradise?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 8.
[26] Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation*, 2015, p. 85.
[27] Exodus 32:6.

In Shakespeare's Sonnet 105, the speaker defends his love from the denigration of the label of idolatry:

> Let not my love be called idolatry,
> Nor my beloved as an idol show,
> Since all alike my songs and praises be
> To one, of one, still such, and ever so. (1-4)[28]

The sonnet rejects idolatry in a way that one might expect of a text published after the Reformation, but it also provides an insight into Shakespeare's thinking on the subject, which may develop our understanding of idolatry in *Romeo and Juliet*. The speaker of the Sonnet goes on to list the 'Fair, kind and true' (10) qualities of his beloved, revealing, as Duncan-Jones notes, 'the Trinity, and in particular the Trinitarian rhetorical formulas of the Arthanasian Creed'.[29] Shakespeare obscures the distinction between God and subject, allowing us to see the immanence of God in the subject. Indeed, the poem seems to present temporal love as a valid expression of divine love. The same is true for Romeo and Juliet. Romeo performs a beatification of sorts, transfiguring Juliet into the blessed Juliet. And, as a candidate for sainthood is required to be dead, he is foretelling her death:

> If I profane with my unworthiest hand
> This holy shrine, the gentle sin is this:
> My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
> To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss.

(1.5.92-95)

Their passion, which is initially expressed as idolatry, matures over the course of the play and eventually reflects the Lutheran sentiment that an individual may 'relate without any

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[28] William Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems* ed. by Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 321.

[29] William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets,* ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004), p. 320.

intermediary to God', except that, at least at this point in our analysis, the secular has

replaced the sacred.[30]

III.   Saint Juliet

Eamon Duffy's essay on the cult of women saints reveals fascinating parallels between Juliet

and the late medieval culture on which Shakespeare's characters are built. [31] Duffy suggests

that there was a 'striking preoccupation with women saints and female sanctity' in pre-

Reformation England, describing a prevalent group of female saints as 'early Roman virgin-

martyrs'.[32] Many of Duffy's examples exhibit features that are apparent in Juliet's story,

perhaps none more so than Agnes, a thirteen-year-old virgin who suffers the unwelcome

advances of a local prefect's son. Agnes rejects the young man, declaring her love and

espousal to God but, angry at her rejection, the prefect's son strips her of her clothing and

sends her to a brothel. Agnes's hair grows instantly long to cover her nakedness and she is

'robed in light'. [33] After he fails to set fire to Agnes, the prefect's son murders her 'with a

dagger through the throat.'[34] The tone of the St Agnes narrative is considerably more

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[30] Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 11.
[31] Eamon Duffy, 'Holy Maydens, Holy Wyfes: The Cult of Women Saints in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth Century England', *Studies in Church History*, 27 (1990), 175–96 (p. 176).
[32] Ibid., p. 180.
[33] Ibid., p. 181.
[34] Ibid., p. 181.

gruesome than Juliet's and her treatment at the hands of the prefect's son more violent and unjust, but her age and determination to assert agency are shared with Juliet.

Barbara is another example of a popular late-medieval saint who shares aspects of her narrative with Juliet; held captive by her father in a tower, she rejects a succession of approved suitors, for which she is horribly tortured to death. Duffy posits that the narratives of these female saints 'attend to the recurrent themes of sexual purity and bloody defiance, chastity and lust, physical and spiritual beauty threatened by bestial cruelty'.[35] Juliet's appearance in the play's first moments, and in the subsequent 'balcony' scene, Act Two, Scene Two, her defiance of familial hatred towards the Montagues and the rejection of her father's proposed suitor, provide compelling parallels to the late-medieval narrative of these female saints.

Françoise Laroque's essay on Shakespeare's 'The Cult of Saints' is a useful addition to this line of inquiry.[36] His analysis draws together Shakespeare's invocation of saints with time, a crucial link for my argument that their self-slaughter is in defiance of time. He details how the play's allocation and concept of time are informed by the liturgical year: the major festival periods of Advent, the Nativity, Easter and ordinary time (the weeks of the Catholic calendar that fall outside of these festivals); and amongst these are the numerous Saints' days, many of which are animated by namesake characters. Not only do Romeo and Juliet progress through time but also, in their elevation as saints of love, *represent* time. Laroque supports the assertion of this elevated state when he writes:

> the double death of the title parts is assimilated to a form of martyrdom, to the choice of paying the heavy price of their young lives for their faith and love. In this, Romeo and Juliet become the 'saints' of the early modern cult of love.[37]

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[35] Duffy, p. 186.

[36] François Laroque, 'The Cult of Saints Revisited: Shakespeare's Martyrs of Love', *Cahiers Élisabéthains: A Journal of English Renaissance Studies*, 73.1 (2008), 23–30.

[37] Ibid., p. 173.

When Romeo resigns himself to 'he that hath direction of my course' (1.4.112), is he referring to fate, Cupid or God? Paul Siegel suggests that *Romeo and Juliet* inherits the 'religion of love' from the Italian novelle, in which 'each of them [the novelle] proclaimed that passionate love brought destruction and death, but at the same time glorified this love'.[38] He neatly supports the breadth of this idea with Harold S. Wilson's assertion about Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* that 'divine love providentially works through human love to a higher end'.[39] When love brings individuals together in death, when they die for love, they become Saints of Cupid. This figuring of an army of love is explicitly addressed in *Antony and Cleopatra,* in which Antony imagines and longs for a paradise for lovers:

> Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand,
> And with our sprightly port make the ghosts gaze:
> Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops,
> And all the haunt be ours. Come, Eros, Eros!
>
> (*Antony and Cleopatra,* 4.15.51-54)[40]

The paradise of death is imagined elsewhere. In Robert Wilmot's *Tancred and Gismund* (1591), Gismund's description of an expected afterlife, despite her suicide, is as a 'pleasant land of love/ Where heavenly love immortally flourisheth' (2.1725-1726). Like Juliet, Gismund does not fear death; when she poisons herself, she is 'Dreadlesse', concluding with a sentiment that Shakespeare later made Juliet's: 'I drink to thee' (4.3.58).

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[38] Paul N. Siegel, 'Christianity and the Religion of Love in *Romeo and Juliet*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 12.4 (1961), 371–92 p. 372.
[39] Harold S. Wilson, 'The Knight's Tale and Teseida Again', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 18 (1949), p. 145.
[40] Ibid., p. 145.

As Romeo and Juliet's meeting scene develops, Shakespeare introduces yet more sacred language, placing particular focus on palmers and pilgrims. Greenblatt suggests that what we are seeing here is a:

> sly blend of displacement and appropriation, the refashioning of traditional religious materials into secular performance, and the confounding of the sacred and the profane.[41]

Greenblatt's argument is that the rituals and practices revealed in the early moments of Romeo and Juliet's relationship borrow from a culture that was shaped by the imperatives of Catholic Christianity. Mark Dahlquist, when exploring this moment, argues that Greenblatt 'ties Shakespeare's theatrical practice to a nostalgia for a vanished Catholic England' and that this 'emphasis on nostalgia is potentially misleading'.[42] He suggests that the Protestant iconophobia cast these practices, and the language that describes them, as strange and dangerous. Both arguments are persuasive: the foreboding sense of danger, which permeates the play, shares a contested space with the Catholic language and practices of the preceding generation. This ambivalence suits the themes of the play and perhaps suited the theological position or transition of much of the play's audience. Greenblatt's assertion that Shakespeare is borrowing religious material for secular performance strongly supports the foundation of my argument, that Juliet and Romeo attempt to find a type of divinity in each other.

Juliet takes up the pilgrim-shrine metaphor, but now the stichometry of their speech and the ambivalent meaning of pilgrimage and pilgrims colour their interaction with something more sexually suggestive:

> JULIET
> Good pilgrim, you do wrong your hand too much,
> Which mannerly devotion shows in this;

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[41] Stephen Greenblatt, *Will in the World.* (London: Norton, 2016), p. 112.

[42] John S Garrison and Kyle Pivetti, *Sexuality and Memory in Early Modern England: Literature and the Erotics of Recollection* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 139.

> For saints have hands that pilgrims' hands do touch,
> And palm to palm is holy palmers' kiss.
>
> ROMEO
> Have not saints lips, and holy palmers too?
>
> JULIET
> Ay, pilgrim, lips that they must use in prayer.
>
> ROMEO
> O then, dear saint, let lips do what hands do.
> They pray: grant thou, lest faith turn to despair.
>
> JULIET
> Saints do not move, though grant for prayers' sake.
>
> ROMEO
> Then move not while my prayer's effect I take.
> *He kisses her.*
> Thus from my lips, by thine, my sin is purged.

<div align="center">(1.5.96-106)</div>

I would like to return briefly to Swanson's suggestion that post-Reformation England was wary of travelling palmers. It is perhaps likely that, for quite different reasons, pilgrims and palmers were endued with a similar suspicion in the late-medieval and early part of the early modern period. Indeed, Grace Tiffany outlines the 'by-then common characterisation of the pilgrim as an impious erotic traveler or vagabond'.[43] Perhaps early modern audiences understood this as an insinuation of Romeo's licentiousness and Juliet's naivety. It is an unsympathetic characterisation, but it offers another instance of suspicion to be raised against the authenticity of Romeo's love.

The pilgrimage metaphor also supports the play's preoccupation with time, as it relates to the liturgical calendar, but also in the nature of pilgrimage, which requires a journey

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[43] Grace Tiffany, *Love's Pilgrimage: The Holy Journey in English Renaissance Literature* (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 2006), p. 17.

over distance and through time. It seems as if Juliet and Romeo, from their first meeting and over the length of the play, explore and challenge these divisions and boundaries of time. As Derick Marsh explains, 'the lovers may love in interludes in a world seemingly released from time [… but] their only real release from time is in death.'[44]

IV.   Self-Renunciation

By the time Romeo leaps over the Capulet Garden wall, several key aspects of the play's delivery have been established. First, Christian worship and practice greatly influence Shakespeare's use of metaphor in the early part of the play; second, Romeo's infatuation with Rosaline spills over into his early encounters with Juliet, but the language has lost its aggression and innuendo; third, Juliet is elevated from the problematic associations of idolatry to a revered veneration, demonstrating their maturing love. What we see in Act Two, Scene Two, the balcony scene, is the further development of Juliet and Romeo as deities and for both, but particularly Romeo, a self-renunciation. It is the first station of the *via mystica*, a pathway that will eventually lead to their unitive deaths:

> But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?
> It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
>
> (2.2.2-3)

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[44] Derick R. C. Marsh, *Passion Lends Them Power: A Study of Shakespeare's Love Tragedies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1976), p. 51.

Robin Headlam Wells captures a certain cultural fatigue for these very famous early moments of Act Two, Scene 2, when he describes how Romeo tests out 'some of the standard lines in the Petrarchist's repertoire, much as a musician might warm up with some arpeggios before an important performance'.[45] In more important ways, Romeo's eulogising is the next step towards a corporeal and spiritual unity with Juliet. The sun and stars (to which Juliet's eyes have been deputised 'to twinkle in their spheres till they return') direct the imagination of the audience towards the heavens, which is exactly where Romeo and Juliet are heading (2.2.17).

By invoking the movements of the stars, Shakespeare keeps time at the forefront of our concerns: the earth's celestial orbit of the sun; sunrise and its symbolic association with resurrection; the division of day and night; the lunar cycle, and how it relates to menstruation, tides and moveable feasts such as Easter and Pentecost. For Romeo, these divisions of time seem to invite his lofty rhetoric. He speaks of gazing on winged messengers of heaven and 'lazy-puffing clouds' (2.2.31), until Juliet pierces his rhetoric with a dose of reality, reminding him that time is used up in compliance with the fulfilment of her father's imperatives, not lost in the ether. But from her pragmatism she can direct their words towards actions. She speaks in legal terms of *denying* fathers and *swearing* love. This, I believe, should be understood as a mystical moment of renunciation. Jill Levenson describes how 'through the chemistry of Juliet's famous words, their former identities—names, family— dissolve'.[46]

Juliet contrasts this dissolving notion of a name against the tangibility of the body, 'It is nor hand nor foot, / Nor arm nor face nor any other part belonging to a man' (2.2.40-42). There is, perhaps, an inherent wariness in the language of Juliet's thesis and yet her oratory is skilful: the use of rhetorical questions, humour, apostrophes, analogies and parenthesis. Of

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[45] Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare's Humanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 120.
[46] Jill Levenson, 'The Definition of Love: Shakespeare's Phrasing in Romeo and Juliet', *Studies in Philology*, 81.3 (1984), 325–47 (p. 27).

course, her speech is a soliloquy and only intended for self-counsel, aside from its dramatic

function, but the eavesdropping Romeo is satisfied with her proposal, declaring in an end-

stopped line of monosyllables:

> I take thee at thy word.
> Call me but love and I'll be new baptised.
> Henceforth I never will be Romeo.
>
> (2.2.49-51)

René Weis points to this baptism as 'chiming with the strand of Christian mysticism that

underpins the play's romantic imagery'.[47] Romeo's self-renunciation is a baptismal act, and a

baptism is purgative, one in which sin is washed away and a fundamental part of the tripartite

route to union with God, described by the thirteenth-century theologian Bonaventure,

requiring purgation, illumination and union.[48]

The *Book of Common Prayer* (1549) instructed early modern parishioners to articulate

a metaphorical conception of marriage in which the 'mystical union that is betwixt Christ and

his Church' is *signified* by the act. [49] The marriage is a version of the superlative mystical

union, an imitation of the union of Christ and Church. In this way, early modern society was

able to conceive mystically of the soul's journey to God through a succession of imitative

acts. Richard of St Victor (1110-1173) explains the mystical tripartite through Christian

marriage 'in the first degree the betrothal takes place, in the second the wedding, in the third

the sexual union, in the fourth childbirth'.[50] Each degree is purgative, illuminative and

unitive. This pattern, especially as expressed by Richard of St Victor, remains the familiar

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[47] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by René Weis, The Arden Shakespeare. Third Series (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2012), p. 189.

[48] See, *The Works of Bonaventure, Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor, and Saint*, trans. by José de Vinck (Paterson, NJ: St Anthony Guild, 1960).

[49] *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, ed. by Brian Cummings (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 434.

[50] de Vinck, p. 159.

maturation of romantic love, but it is perhaps more striking when used to describe the soul's

journey to God. He goes on to develop his itinerary:

> Let us penetrate still deeper and speak more openly. In the first degree the soul thirsts
> for God, in the second she thirsts to go to God, in the third she thirsts to go into God,
> and in the fourth she thirsts to live as God lives.[51]

The sequence of love that Romeo and Juliet experience bears conspicuous similarities to

Richard of St Victor's *Four Degrees of Violent Charity,* perhaps more strictly adhering to the

first simple list, but Richard's definition is iterative, repeating variations on the theme that

expand and collapse its meaning. The most intriguing assertion is that 'in the third degree she

[the soul] is in a way put to death in God; in the fourth she is resurrected with Christ'.[52] This

formulation follows the pattern of *cupio dissolvi*.

David Lucking observes that the ultimate transformation in *Romeo and Juliet* is not

from social disharmony to peace but from 'plurality into unity', a sentiment that may have

resonated with the post-Reformation audience, weary of sectarian violence and division.[53]

This progress into unity also functions metaphysically, through Romeo and Juliet's journey

towards unitive grace. Each state urges the next along, as stations of a pilgrimage. Juliet's

show of passion for Romeo, made more compelling by the clarity of her expression, leads

Friar Laurence to promise 'short work' of their matrimonial blessing (2.6.35). Indeed, Friar

Laurence considers the strength of their passion for union, ostensibly sexual, and states that

he will not allow them to 'stay alone / Till Holy Church incorporate two in one' (2.6.36-37).

This line offers the neatest explanation of marriage as a mystical act, but not a flawless and

permanent mystical act. Marriage for Juliet, even to Romeo, is constructed within the

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[51] Ibid., p. 159.
[52] Ibid., p. 161.
[53] David Lucking, '"And All Things Change Them to the Contrary" Romeo and Juliet and the Metaphysics of Language', *English Studies*, 78.1 (1997), 8–18 (p. 16).

patriarchal imperatives that allow Capulet to later say, 'An you be mine, I'll give you to my friend' (3.5.192). It is also a state which is ultimately dissolved by death. Romeo insists on Friar Laurence marrying them:

> Then plainly know, my heart's dear love is set
> On the fair daughter of rich Capulet
> As mine on hers, so hers is set on mine
> And all combined, save what thou must combine
> By holy marriage.
>
> <div align="right">(2.3.53-57)</div>

Romeo's haste seems to acknowledge that the important business takes place before and after the marriage, in the combining of their hearts and their anticipated sexual union. All that is left to do is for Friar Laurence to close their hands together and utter a few holy words. Juliet shares this perfunctory view of their marriage ceremony when she later says, 'God joined my heart and Romeo's, thou our hands' (4.1.56).

Their union, in marriage, sex and death, is never witnessed but rather intimated in the surrounding scenes. As Juliet goes off to marry Romeo, the Nurse will be heading 'another way / To fetch a ladder' (2.5.72-73), giving Romeo access to Juliet's bedchamber. The Nurse's description of her task is itself oxymoronic: her profane business lies in 'another way' to God and yet the ladder functions for Romeo as Jacob's ladder, an ascension to heavenly bliss.[54] The Nurse and Friar Laurence function in parallel, providing the means for spiritual and sexual union. But innuendo even pervades Friar Laurence's sententious pre-nuptial warnings when he says to Juliet that 'Romeo shall thank thee, daughter, for us both' (2.6.22), after which Romeo and Juliet kiss.

The marriage initiates several figurative deaths: for both, their childhoods, their individuation and, soon to follow, their virginities; for Juliet, her maiden name. It seems that

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[54] Genesis 28:10.

by their marriage both will be nameless, Romeo having renounced his in Act Two, Scene Two and Juliet relinquishing hers through marriage.

<div align="center">V.   Sexual Union</div>

Shakespeare reveals Romeo and Juliet's sexual union through the insinuation of Friar Laurence and the Nurse; the latter's gleeful anticipation of the 'burden' (2.5.76) of Romeo's body on top of Juliet and the Friar's warning that 'These violent delights have violent ends / And in their triumph die' (2.6.10), returning us to the die/orgasm pun and to the interchange of sex and violence which we see throughout the play. Weis notes that this phrase originates from the proverbial expression 'nothing violent can be permanent' and so we see that violence as physical aggression and sexual intercourse are temporal articles, perhaps capable of suspending but not transcending time.[55]

Juliet's famous 'Gallop apace' soliloquy, which opens Act Three, Scene Two, reveals a rich account of her anticipation of sexual union with Romeo. It also reiterates the mystical sequence that I have set out, the purgation and illumination on the course to their union. I have previously argued in this chapter that each attempt to achieve a perfect union causes an abstract death; in sexual union it is the death, for Juliet and Romeo, of sexual innocence and a corporeal fusion, which follows the joining of hands through marriage. In Juliet's imagination, we may also witness the blending of sex and death in orgasm and its suspension and creation of what Jennifer Pacenza calls 'embodied time', a limen that reveals itself through sex and which is denied in linear time.[56] Pacenza's observation, which she makes

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[55] Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Weis p. 230.
[56] *Shakespeare and Donne: Generic Hybrids and the Cultural Imaginary*, ed. by Judith H. Anderson and Jennifer C. Vaught, First edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 64.

through a discussion of the 'die' pun in Donne and Shakespeare, perhaps allows for a brief exploration of their parallels in relation to the specific subject of suspended time. Theresa DiPasquale's thoughts on Donne's use of aeviternal time, 'the mode of duration experienced by disembodied human souls', a term which Donne does not himself use, may be considered manifest in sexual pleasure.[57]

Sex and death also manifest throughout the play as sex and violence. Lucking explores the function of these oxymora and asserts that violence is invested with a 'sexual connotation from the beginning' and that this dualism of sex and violence, love and hate informs our understanding of the narrative and its characters.[58] If self-destruction is regarded as the ultimate act of violence, then according to Lucking's position, it might also figure as an act of sex as has been asserted of Juliet's suicide, in which she stabs herself with Romeo's dagger. Lucking suggests that Shakespeare elevates the oxymora from 'an exclusively verbal phenomenon' to 'a world in which things are literally transformed to their opposites' and these conversions are instigated by violent and sexual acts.[59] When Juliet appears on the balcony, she is imagined as 'light', 'east' and the 'sun' (2.2.2-4). As Lucking explains, Romeo describes the process by which 'darkness transforms itself into light' from a 'physical light to a spiritual dawn'.[60] Juliet is a blazon of ancestral hate and her miraculous and immediate transformation alludes to the motif of light as a symbol of Christian purity, renewal and resurrection. These apparent biblical parallels continue throughout the play and elide with sentiments of Christian mysticism. In his *Confessions*, Augustine declares:

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[57] Theresa M. DiPasquale, 'From Here to Aeviternity: Donne's Atemporal Clocks', *Modern Philology*, 110.2 (2012), 226–52 (p. 229).
[58] David Lucking, '"And All Things Change Them to the Contrary" Romeo and Juliet and the Metaphysics of Language', *English Studies*, 78.1 (1997), 8–18 (p. 10).
[59] Ibid., p. 11.
[60] Ibid., p. 12.

> He who knows the truth knows the light, and he who knows the light knows eternity. Love knows it. O Eternal Truth and True Love and Beloved Eternity! You are my God, to you I sigh day and night.[61]

Richard of St Victor describes the 'abyss of divine light that the human intellectual soul in this state, having forgotten all exterior things, does not even know itself and completely passes over into its God'.[62] Richard offers further illumination on the sequence of divine love, which I will explore later.

Returning to Lucking's assertion of oxymora breaking free from their verbal mooring to the transformation of states is an exciting proposition, but one that needs qualification: in these transformations, neither one of the oxymoronic elements is lost entirely. Juliet is figured as a shining light, but such a metaphor requires the continued presence of darkness to surround her. The transformation is temporary. Continuing with this line of interpretation, perhaps all of the oxymoronic transformations are temporary. Take, for example, Juliet's exploration of liberty which follows her moment of transfiguration:

> 'Tis almost morning. I would have thee gone,
> And yet no farther than a wanton's bird,
> That lets it hop a little from his hand,
> Like a poor prisoner in his twisted gyves,
> And with a silken thread plucks it back again,
> So loving-jealous of his liberty.
>
> <div align="right">(2.2.176-181)</div>

Juliet desires to have Romeo gone, albeit to safety, and yet remain. But the final phrase 'loving-jealous' requires further consideration. Juliet imagines Romeo as a tethered bird, permitted freedom, but only to the length of a silken thread. This recalls Psalm 55, 'Oh that I had wings like a dove: then would I fly away and rest,' and anticipates Herman Hugo's *cupio*

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[61] McGinn, p. 317.
[62] McGinn, p. 160.

dissolvi emblem in the *Pia Desideria* (1624) (Ps. 55:6). While love and jealousy are not entirely antonymic, the phrase seems to follow the pattern of Romeo's lamentation earlier in the play in which, over a series of oxymora, he declares, 'O brawling love, O loving hate/ O anything of nothing first create!' (1.1.174-5). Love and jealousy, according to Lucking's conception of transformational oxymora, merge, but the liberty of Romeo, as the tethered bird, is a temporary illusion. Lucking suggests that 'night can be converted into day when it is transfigured by love' and so captivity is transformed to liberty when it springs from love.[63] He describes Juliet as 'an incarnate oxymoron' explaining that she has faced the terror of death to 'attain a richer life' to reincarnate and then to die.[64] This requires us to accept that Juliet's final death represents a failure in her objective, a failure to 'attain a richer life'. Juliet certainly confronts a series of terrifying images before drinking the sleeping potion, but none is of death itself. Her fear seems rooted in *living*. She is afraid that the 'mixture do not work at all?' or that it will fail to function as planned and she will awake in the tomb and witness the 'terror of the place' (4.3.38). For a fleeting moment, she contemplates the notion that Friar Laurence may have supplied her with a poison, but she quickly repudiates such an idea and reveals no sense of fearing death itself. My second point of departure is that her final death is not a failure but the fulfilment of her objective. Juliet and Romeo share a desire to find union with / in one another. They have practised this unity in marriage and sex, but both have proved mutable. The solution is in their shared death, which combines these attempts, echoing the bonds of matrimonial and sexual union, in perpetuity.

The soliloquy opens with Juliet urging time to pass, imagined as the hoofbeats of 'fiery-footed steeds' galloping 'towards Phoebus' lodging' (3.2.1-2), impatient for Romeo's return and the consummation of their marriage. She urges 'Love-performing night' to 'spread

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[63] Lucking, p. 13.
[64] Lucking, p. 18.

thy close curtain […] That runaways' eyes may wink' (3.2.5-6). The phrase 'runaways' eyes'

has divided scholars. Weis glosses 'runaways' as 'fugitives'[65] but Roger Prior, unsatisfied

with the notion that Juliet and Romeo should fear a fugitive or vagabond, dedicates an essay

to revealing his contention that 'runaways' is a compositor error and should read

'turnekeyes'.[66] Prior's detailed argument has dramatic merit, with Juliet invoking the

character of a keen-eyed guard and, by extension, the prison she and Romeo must inhabit.

This prison metaphor recalls the conditions from which *cupio dissolvi* was invoked in early

modern literature. But there are several compelling accounts of this phrase, none of which

requires an error. First, as Weis posits, although 'runaways' would have been understood as a

fugitive or vagabond, this is an altogether more complex and compelling allusion.[67] Juliet

and Romeo are imagined as the charioteers to a team of bolting horses, careering inexorably

towards their deaths. There is also scope to interpret Juliet and Romeo as the 'runaways',

stolen from the imperatives and hatred of their families.

A notable theory, and useful to the argument of this chapter, is developed by Gary

McCown. He posits that 'Juliet's soliloquy is a dramatized version of the epithalamium and

the context of this type of lyric poem identifies the "runaway" quite probably as Love or

Cupid.'[68] In a survey of Continental and English epithalamia, McCown provides strong

evidence of the popularity of a runaway or fugitive Cupid figure before and at the time of

Romeo and Juliet's composition. He details the debate surrounding two early modern

versions of Cupid, sighted and blind or blindfolded, both of which are accounted for in

Juliet's soliloquy. His hypothesis rests on the notion that a sighted Cupid emits a bright and

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[65] Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by Weis, p. 247.
[66] Roger Prior, '"Runnawayes Eyes": A Genuine Crux', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 40.2 (1989), 191 (p. 194).
[67] Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by Weis, p. 247.
[68] Gary M. McCown, '"Runnawayes Eyes" and Juliet's Epithalamium', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 27.2 (1976), 150–70 (p. 150).

powerful light from his eyes which would reveal their clandestine meeting, and so Juliet

wishes for him to 'wink' and thus shroud them in darkness.

While this simple phrase may accommodate a number of meanings, I suggest that

Juliet and Romeo are the 'Runaways' and that Juliet's wish is to meet and blindly make love,

reiterating her priority of substance over ornament. Juliet's fear becomes a longing to

experience Romeo without words or deceptive looks but through touch alone:

> Spread thy close curtain, love-performing night,
> That runaways' eyes may wink, and Romeo
> Leap to these arms, untalked of and unseen.
>
> (3.2.5-7)

Juliet's relationship with night, as an accomplice in safely conveying Romeo to her, and then

masking her blushes and teaching her how to 'lose a winning match' (3.2.12), is part of the

central paradox of the play. Juliet's celebration of night returns us to the parallels of Christian

mysticism, specifically John of the Cross' sixteenth-century poem 'Dark Night of the Soul'.

The speaker describes a sensual assignation, which begins, 'forth unobserved I went, / My

house being now at rest'. (1.4-5) His progress is aided 'By the secret ladder, disguised / O,

happy lot!' (2.2-3) and like the winking eyes of Juliet's 'runaways' the speaker moves 'In

secret, seen of none' (3.2). As Juliet and Romeo are illuminated to 'do their amorous rites /

By their own beauties' (3.2.8-9), so the speaker is 'Without other light or guide / Save that

which in my heart was burning'. For Juliet, the night is 'civil', 'gentle' and 'loving' (3.2.10-

20); for the speaker of 'Dark Night of the Soul', night is 'more lovely than the dawn'. Juliet's

soliloquy and the poem turn towards death, both in the literal sense and as it is suggestive of

orgasm. For the poem's speaker, 'All ceased and I abandoned myself, / Leaving my cares

forgotten among the lilies.'[69] Elizabeth Clarke observes that:

> any mention of 'lilies' merely brings forth musings on chastity from early modern
> commentators, who are at least on the conscious level wedded to a symbolic reading
> of the lily as an emblem of sexual purity.[70]

For *Romeo and Juliet*, the suggestion is that cares, chastity and selfhood have been

abandoned. This parallel points to important aspects of both the soliloquy and the play. The

night, and Juliet and Romeo's sexual union, are an essential pathway towards a perfect union.

In John of the Cross's *The Ascent of Mount Carmel,* a book-length guide to *Dark Night of the*

Soul, he explains that the soul passes through two nights, 'which spiritual writers call

purgations or purifications'.[71] He goes on to say that 'the first night is the night […] of the

sensual part of the soul' and the second night, which for Juliet and Romeo takes place in the

Capulet tomb, is 'the spiritual part […] when God wishes to bring them into union with

Himself.'[72]

It appears that Juliet's soliloquy is the confluence of several versions of love and

desire, chiefly those of the religion of love and Christian mysticism. Indeed, in several works

of Christian mysticism, symbols and methods that are often associated with the intervention

of Cupid are appropriated to God. Origen, in his commentary on the *Song of Songs*, interprets

'I have been wounded by charity' (Song 5:8) as 'I have been smitten through with the dart of

His passionate love'.[73]

McCown's labelling of Juliet's soliloquy as an epithalamium directs us towards the

most influential epithalamium of Christian mysticism, *The Song of Songs.*[74] Returning to my

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[69] St John of the Cross, *The Poems of St. John of the Cross*, trans. by David Lewis (London: Thomas Baker, 1908).
[70] Elizabeth Clarke, *Politics, Religion, and the Song of Songs in Seventeenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 8.
[71] St John of the Cross, *Mystical Doctrine of St John of the Cross* (London: Continuum, 2006), p. 6.
[72] Ibid., p. 6.
[73] McGinn, p. 10.
[74] Also known as the *Song of Solomon*, *The Song of Songs* is an epic poem of the Hebrew Bible.

assertion that Juliet longs for a sightless, wordless union with Romeo, we see a parallel in

Madame Guyon's exegesis of *The Song of Songs*, written in 1682, when she speaks of the

soul's union with God and asserts, 'Sight and knowledge exist no longer where there is

neither division nor distinction, but a perfect fusion.'[75] For Juliet, in her quasi-mystical

longings, she wishes to be blind to any differences that may be revealed through sight. Guyon

goes on, 'Now, the whole of this must be concealed and hidden away from her sight, so that

like a Seraphim she may have her eyes veiled' (Isiah 6:2).[76]

Shakespeare's allusion to *The Song of Songs* in Juliet's Act Three, Scene Two

soliloquy is broken by the entrance of the Nurse and then this allusion is suspended for three

scenes, and finally resumes in Juliet and Romeo's aubade of Act Three, Scene Five. The most

obvious link between the two texts is the use of pomegranates, which Weis glosses as

'featuring prominently in one of [Shakespeare's] favourite sources, the erotic Song of

Songs'.[77] The pomegranate has a rich symbolic history. Mary Abram identifies three biblical

contexts in which the pomegranate emerges: sacred, of Exodus; secular, of Deuteronomy; and

sensuous, of *The Song of Songs*. George Ferguson suggests several interpretations for the

pomegranate, perhaps most intriguingly as a Pagan symbol of spring, reimagined in Christian

art as a 'hope in immortality and of resurrection.'[78]

The symbolic message is amplified by Juliet's invocation of the nightingale, which

'signified the soul's longing for heaven' and 'in Christian art […] the Christian faithful and

martyrs.'[79] It seems appropriate to support the symbolic meaning of the pomegranate and

nightingale with reference to Christian art as Shakespeare's aubade is richly ekphrastic,

painting for the audience a prelapsarian scene, baroquely expressed with Pagan and Christian

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[75] McGinn, p. 44.
[76] McGinn, p. 44.
[77] Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by Weis, p. 271.
[78] George Ferguson, *Signs & Symbols in Christian Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 37.
[79] Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, *A Guide to Christian Art* (New York: T&T Clark, 2020), p. 191.

symbolism. Romeo's lark, which contradicts the nightingale by signalling daybreak, is another symbol of the aspiration for heaven as the lark only sings in ascending flight. This cluster of symbols, the pomegranate, nightingale and lark, perform important narrative and lyrical functions. They signal the physical and metaphysical conflict of time for Juliet and Romeo. The lark announces the dawn but also, like the nightingale and the pomegranate tree, speaks of death and heaven. Temporal impermanence sits within the symbols of an aspiration towards resurrection and immutable union, a *cupio dissolvi* urge.

VI.   A Thing Like Death

Romeo and Juliet's pathway to death involves a number of iterations and attempts. Derick Marsh asserts that 'Juliet is, in a dramatic sense, dead from the moment she takes the potion'.[80] Juliet and Romeo have progressed through renunciation, matrimonial and sexual union and yet have failed to escape time. Romeo's expulsion from Verona, which mirrors Adam's banishment from Eden, is for him a 'purgatory, torture, hell itself' (3.3.18). For Romeo, union with Juliet can exist in its ephemeral state in life, in its eternity in death but not at all in banishment. What Juliet and Romeo seek is what Augustine describes as finding 'the

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[80] Marsh, p. 78.

unchangeable and true eternity of Truth above my changeable mind' and so, denied this in life, they are propelled towards death.[81]

Juliet has already died a symbolic death: the renunciation of her name and familial identity, such an important aspect of the play's narrative. In a sense, Juliet *Capulet* is dead, a death compounded by the consummation of the marriage through the sexual death of *la petite mort*.[82] Her next and penultimate death occurs in Act Four, Scene Five as the result of the sleeping potion. The Nurse and Lady Capulet, on discovering Juliet's body, share their grief through language, its keening repetition and simplicity with enjambed lines:

> NURSE
>
> She's dead, deceased. She's dead, alack the day!
>
> LADY CAPULET
>
> Alack the day, she's dead, she's dead, she's dead. (4.5.23-24)

It is a mimetic death, but real enough for Capulet to observe that 'Her blood is settled, and her joints are stiff' (4.5.26). Once again, Juliet is suspended in time, existing for 'two and forty hours' (4.1.105), in the limen of life and death. Weis points out that forty-two hours does not match the narrative, and grapples for a suitable explanation for what he calls an 'incongruous, yet oddly precise timescale', finally allowing for a transposition error.[83] Numerologists might point to the significance of forty-two as it relates to the Prophetic or Apocalyptic year of the Book of Revelation. God's two chosen witnesses prophesy for 1,260 days.[84] Strikingly, the prophets are killed by a beast that has emerged from the abyss. Their bodies lie unburied for three and a half days until God breathes life into them and they are

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[81] McGinn, p. 318.

[82] 'la petite mort, *n.' OED Online.* The brief loss or weakening of consciousness. Now: *spec.* the sensation of orgasm as likened to death; an orgasm. Oxford University Press.

[83] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by Rene Weis (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2012), p. 30.

[84] Equivalent to 42 months of 30 days.

invited to heaven, together. Rather than a miscalculation on the part of Friar Laurence or indeed a transposition error, it is possible that Shakespeare exploited this connection to cast Romeo and Juliet as God's prophets and foreshadow their death and resurrection.

Juliet's mimetic death is an actualised account of the play's interrogation of the boundary of time. Targoff asserts that mortal love, for Romeo and Juliet, cannot cross the Stygian boundary; it cannot translate itself from temporal to eternal and its failure to do so enriches the tragedy.[85] Targoff's argument is compelling, but these deep ontological concerns are most enriching in their ambivalence. Rather than Romeo and Juliet desperately hurrying in their mortal passion, racing against a merciless time, they are guided by the patterns of Christian worship towards an uncertain promise.

Targoff suggests that Romeo's proposed bargaining of 'what sorrow can' for 'one short minute' (2.5.3-5) reveals 'a willingness to forego any future pleasures' but Romeo's invitation to Death might be better understood, as Targoff acknowledges, as defiance. [86] Romeo seeks union to 'close our hands with holy words, / Then love-devouring death do what he dare' (2.5.5-6). Romeo is impetuous and combative, perhaps influenced by the violent feud between his family and the Capulets. Now bonded with Juliet by holy words, he goads death to do his worst. Perhaps he feels that sanctioned love arms him for conflict, or that, like God's witnesses of the Book of Revelation, he and Juliet are destined to be destroyed by the Beast but resurrected to heaven thereafter.

For Romeo, Targoff suggests, death devours love, but that interpretation is challenged by Romeo's defiance. Romeo does not invite death to do what he *will*, but rather what he *dares*. There is a good deal of daring in *Romeo and Juliet*, introduced in the first quarrel

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[85] Ramie Targoff, 'Mortal Love: Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and the Practice of Joint Burial', *Representations*, 120.1 (2012), 17–38.
[86] Targoff, p. 29.

when Sampson insists, 'Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at / them, which is disgrace to them if they bear it' (1.1.43).

On several other occasions 'dare' is used in the context of violence; it is part of the vernacular of the feud. In other ways, when spoken by Juliet, the Nurse and Friar Laurence, Shakespeare tilts its meaning away from a physical imperative to a courageous state of mind. Romeo uses 'dare' in the context of a personified love, a type of inversion of the 'love-devouring death' that we have briefly explored (2.5.7). He says:

> With love's light wings did I o'erperch these walls,
> For stony limits cannot hold love out,
> And what love can do, that *dares* love attempt.
> Therefore thy kinsmen are no stop to me.

> (2.2.71-4, my emphasis)

Shakespeare has Romeo parallel the dualism of love and death with the violent conflict of the Montagues and Capulets. Romeo takes the threat of death seriously, but he is a soldier of love and is prepared to engage with the fight. Indeed, Romeo and Juliet's battle with time, to free themselves from its grasp, has fundamentally disrupted its normal course; Capulet declares, 'Death lies on her like an untimely frost' (4.5.26-28) and when Friar Laurence enters and ironically asks if she is 'ready to go to church' (4.5.33), Capulet extends the theme beyond the 'woeful day' and the premature arrival of winter, to the permanence of Juliet's death, making her 'Ready to go, but never to return' (4.5.34).

The audience next encounter Romeo in high spirits, expecting 'joyful news' and lifted 'above the ground with cheerful thoughts' (5.1.2-5). He recounts a dream:

> 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.

> (5.1.5-9)

Weis points to Marlowe's 'Hero and Leander' (1598) for 'breath'd life into her lips'[87] but

Shakespeare also uses a similar construction in 'Venus and Adonis' (1593): 'For on the grass

she lies as she were slain, / Till his breath breatheth life in her again' (473-4).[88]

There are several striking elements to Romeo's short passage. Although Romeo and

Juliet are separated, he in Mantua and Juliet now entombed in the Capulet vault in Verona,

they are both together in a suspended time between life, represented at its fullest by the recent

consummation of their marriage, and the death that we know, and perhaps they suspect,

awaits them. The spirit that lifts Romeo above the ground is part of the extended metaphor of

his desire for a heavenly (rather than temporal) union with Juliet. They are separated through

his banishment, but hopeful of a unified resurrection.

His dream is an echo of Juliet's 'ill-divining soul' from which she tells Romeo that 'I

see thee, now thou art so low, / As one dead in the bottom of a tomb' (3.5.54-6). It is

tempting to see Juliet's vision as hopeless and Romeo's as a dream of imperial triumph. But

these visions are not mutually exclusive, instead they are directed towards alternate

perspectives of the same outcome. Juliet sees Romeo dead; Romeo sees himself resurrected

by Juliet's kiss. His continued veneration of Juliet endows this oneiric kiss with restorative

properties, returning us to the *Song of Songs,* which begins 'Let him kiss me with the kisses

of his mouth'.[89]

The symbolic significance of a divine kiss appears elsewhere in mystical exegesis.

Grace Jantzen considers the role of Christ's kiss in the mystical writings of the late eleventh-

century Bernard of Clairvaux, who associates kisses with the three stages of the mystical

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[87] Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. by Weis, p. 313.
[88] William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Poems: Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece, and the Shorter Poems*, ed. by Katherine Duncan Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2007).
[89] McGinn, p. 42.

path. Jantzen argues that, more so than Origen, Bernard's use is 'deeply affective, progress being the result of penitence and love, not of intellectual insight'.[90] Bernard's language, like Romeo's advancement towards Juliet, is 'of passion and desire, not cool intellectual progress.'[91] Derick Marsh talks of this in general terms, suggesting that Romeo and Juliet 'simply exist at a far higher level of consciousness […] in comprehensiveness, and in acuteness of feeling, in capacity to experience joy and grief'.[92] It is not simply that love has sharpened the edge of their emotions, but that their love is an appropriation of divine longing; following the patterns of Christian mysticism, and borrowing a good deal of its power and resonance. Marsh suggests that the price for these acute emotions, which are 'presented as a value in itself', is that they leave Romeo and Juliet 'as susceptible to suffering as to joy'. The notion of Romeo and Juliet's divine suffering parallels my account of Timon's suffering and is inherent in the mystical dimensions of *cupio dissolvi*. Suffering becomes a part of the corporeal process of dissolution and expression of self-loathing.

The separation of joy and suffering, however, perhaps overlooks the historical reality of the mystical paradox, depicted chiefly in Christ's Passion. The Dominican friar and disciple of Eckhart, Henry Suso (1295-1366), explored the divine intersection of joy and suffering in his work *Eternal Wisdom*. In a section titled 'The incomparable nobility of earthly suffering', a dialogue takes place between Eternal Wisdom and a Servant, with the former instructing:

> There is nothing more painful than suffering, and nothing more joyful than to have suffered. Suffering is a short pain and a long joy […] suffering kills suffering […] If anyone were able rightly to weigh time and eternity, he ought rather to desire to lie in

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[90] Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion, 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 127.
[91] Jantzen, p. 127.
[92] Marsh, p. 83.

a fiery furnace for a hundred years than to be deprived in eternity of the smallest reward for the smallest suffering; for this has an end, but the other is without end.[93]

 Juliet and Romeo suffer as they progress along the *via mystica* in anticipation of a union 'without end'. Marsh's assertion that their deaths are 'self-defeating' and that 'there is no unequivocal triumph possible over time or death' is not only grimly pessimistic, but also fails to appreciate that self-defeat is precisely the objective of Romeo and Juliet's project. Their desire is to dissolve the boundaries between themselves as individuals and be released into eternity.

The false report of Juliet's death is the result of time, misdirection and, symbolically, death itself; Friar John later reports that he was sealed up in a house 'where the infectious pestilence did reign' (5.210), and so, death, time and chance appear to fight back. In what Richard Courtney describes as 'the dignity of despair', Romeo swears, 'Is it e'en so? Then I defy you, stars' (V.1.24).[94] Romeo's defiance of fate is to find horses and gallop off to lie with Juliet. Rather than fate working to murder the lovers, it is working to keep them apart against all of their attempts to find a union together.

VII.   *Unio Mystica*

Romeo and Juliet's deaths are prefigured in the series of station moments, as resting points on a pilgrimage, that have been considered over the course of this chapter. These station moments are unitive attempts, mostly focused on the sensory expression of that fleeting unity with the divine: the dissolvable marriage, the ephemeral jouissance of sexual union and the mimetic death of Romeo's banishment and Juliet's sedated body, her blood settled and joints

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[93] Henry Suso, *Henry Suso: The Exemplar, with Two German Sermons*, ed. by Frank J. Tobin, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), p. 246.

[94] Richard Courtney, *Shakespeare's World of Death: The Early Tragedies; Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar, Hamlet*, The Director's Shakespeare Series (Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1995), p. 64.

stiff. They belong to a cataphatic theology, treading a pathway towards the ineffable, apophatic eternity of *actual* death and a *unio mystica*.

The Eastern Orthodox theologian, Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958), describes a ladder of cataphatic progress as 'a series of steps up which the soul can mount to contemplation'.[95] This typology, according to Julie Canlis, figures in Hellenistic philosophy as Plato's 'ladder of love', which uses the metaphor to describe the ascent of love from an attraction towards beauty to a contemplation of beauty itself.[96] In these final moments of the play, the theological swerve towards the apophatic occurs after a series of cataphatic moments that expand on Romeo's description of a 'lightning before death' (5.3.90). The temporal and mystical dialectic continues to exert pressure on Romeo's understanding of the flesh and the spirit. Shakespeare's verse becomes busy with the settling of Romeo's affairs: confession leads to a viaticum (a deathbed eucharist) for both Romeo and Juliet, expressed through the sacrament of the poison, the sensuality of the kiss and, for Juliet, the penetration of Romeo's dagger.

It is useful here to consider how Shakespeare's most overtly mystical work, the allegorical poem 'The Phoenix and the Turtle', has been understood by scholars as an articulation of the operation and pattern of Shakespearean mysticism. The poem is generally regarded favourably, celebrated by John Dover Wilson as a 'rare and irreplaceable possession' perhaps for its 'mystical profundity'. [97] Robert Ellrodt offers a useful starting point in understanding the philosophical qualities of the poem, stating that 'The poet is

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[95] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood NY: St. Vladamir's Seminary Press, 1976), p. 40.
[96] Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2010), p. 27.
[97] William Shakespeare and Dover Wilson, John, *The Poems*, The Works of Shakespeare Edited for the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. xxxiii; George Wilson Knight, *The Imperial Theme: Further Interpretations of Shakespeare's Tragedies Including the Roman Plays* (London: Methuen, 1979), p. 349.

concerned only with the perfect union achieved by the lovers' souls, an idea perhaps more closely related to Christian mysticism than genuine Platonism.' [98] But Ellrodt cautions against forcing a theological framework on the poem and provides a vacillating argument that places it everywhere and nowhere, arguing that it is only inducing a 'dim awareness of the mystical symbolism […] by the religious phrasing and images.'[99]

G. Wilson Knight, also writing in the 1960s, offers a description of the Phoenix which functions just as well as a description of 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' itself, which he describes as 'a semi-transcendental creature'. He goes on to explain that 'in Elizabethan poetry divine and human converge [...] intuitions of the divine are transmitted through human stuff, or experience.'[100] The 'oneness' and central paradox that is pursued in 'The Phoenix and Turtle' is invoked through the place and imagery of Romeo and Juliet's final moments.

Romeo arrives at the Capulet tomb prepared to die, describing the place as a 'womb of death' (5.3.45). This motif, of a life born into death, that inherent to fecundity is decay, is perhaps the underpinning oxymoron of the play and one which invokes alchemical, biblical, and mystical allusions. It is also central to a desire for death and resurrection, a *cupio dissolvi*. The 'womb of death' motif could serve as a defining element of the play, much as Shakespeare invites the reader to contemplate the 'urn' in *The Phoenix and the Turtle* – 'To this urn let those repair' (65). The urn is imagined as the vessel housing the ashes of the dead and also the elegiac poem itself.[101] Shakespeare's Sonnet 86 also grapples with the pairing of womb and tomb:

> Was it the proud full sail of his great verse,
> Bound for the prize of all-too-precious you,
> That did my ripe thoughts in my brain in-hearse,

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[98] Ellrodt, Robert, p. 104.
[99] Ellrodt, Robert, p. 105.
[100] Wilson Knight, *The Mutual Flame*, pp. 150–51.
[101] William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Poems: Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece, and the Shorter Poems*, ed. by Katherine Duncan Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2007). p. 428.

> Making their tomb the womb wherein they grew?[102]

<div align="center">(86.1-4)</div>

The tomb becomes a source of nourishment, a place of unexpected, paradoxical fecundity and regeneration. One might even imagine the stage properties of the play's early performances, in which Juliet's bed, the honeymoon bed, is repurposed to function as her table tomb, drawing together visual and linguistic elements in a powerful reiteration of the connection between desire, death and resurrection. The womb/tomb metaphor gains greater significance when we remember that Romeo and Juliet will not live long enough to procreate. Like the Phoenix and the Turtle, Romeo and Juliet die 'Leaving no posterity' (59).[103] Their desire for eternity cannot be realised through their progeny and so must be attained by a divine regeneration.

The notion of fertility and death finding representation in a shared locus is repeated by Friar Laurence when he describes the tomb as a 'nest / Of death' (5.3.151-152). This also returns us to 'The Phoenix and the Turtle' in which Reason declares:

> Death is now the Phoenix' nest,
> And the Turtle's loyal breast
> To eternity doth rest.
> <div align="center">(56-58)</div>

The Phoenix' nest provides an elegant link between the play and the poem, and through a 1593 anthology of poetry, titled *The Phoenix' Nest*, to a number of important literary figures, among them Walter Raleigh, Edward de Vere and George Peele. Such was the ubiquity of the Phoenix figure in early modern literature, by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, that it

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[102] William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets,* ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004), p. 283.
[103] Shakespeare, Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen, *Shakespeare's Poems,* p. 428.

seems likely that the bird's connotation with love, resurrection and mysticism would have been broadly understood.[104]

Romeo's 'lightening before death' (5.3.90) offers a significant insight into his state of mind in the moments that precede his death. Levenson directs the reader towards the OED and Dent for the proverbial origins of the phrase, which concerns a 'revival of the spirits […] just before death'.[105] Romeo's swan song also appears as a type of dirge, a lament for the dead, like Reason's Threnos, the lyrical lament that concludes 'The Phoenix and the Turtle'. While the phrase is likely to have been understood in the way in which I have outlined, Levenson notes the audience would hear 'lightning' and this would return them to Juliet's metaphor:

> It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden,
> Too like the lightning which doth cease to be
> Ere one can say 'It lightens'.

> (2.2.118-120)

The phrase seems to operate in two ways: first, towards a peculiar type of foreboding, which lifts the spirit; second, a reiteration of impermanence and the haste that this induces when one perceives that time is running out. Lightning also has a mystical dimension, revealing the divine from the briefest moment before the temporal world is returned to the darkness of unknowing. Romeo's next line 'O, how may I / call this a lightening?' seems to be in response to his first sight of Juliet and his very tender 'O my love, my wife' (5.3.90-1). Both levity and haste are abruptly transformed into a sorrowful scrutiny of the effects of death on Juliet and with this a return to a type of cataphatic experience that is delivered through the

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[104] Joe Nigg provides a meticulous survey of the Phoenix in early modern literature. See, Joe Nigg, *The Phoenix: An Unnatural Biography of a Mythical Beast* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).
[105] 'lightening, *n.*' *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2021. Web. 3 September 2021.

senses. Romeo recalls the honey of Juliet's breath, her red lips and cheeks. He declares his

intention to stay with her, to fend off the advances of death:

> Here, here will I remain
> With worms that are thy chambermaids. O, here
> Will I set up my everlasting rest

<div align="center">

(5.3.108-110)

</div>

These final words function to remind the audience that Romeo is determined to die. As both

Weis and Levenson note, 'rest' also returns the audience to innuendo, revealing an afterlife of

permanent sexual jouissance which is then prefigured in Romeo's instruction to his senses:

> Eyes, look your last;
> Arms, take your last embrace, and lips, O you
> The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss

<div align="center">

(5.3.112-114)

</div>

The kiss is a central figure of Christian mysticism and its significance to the *Song of Songs* is

best illustrated by its place as the text's opening image. Theodoret of Cyrus, a fifth-century

theologian, describes the kiss, the closing image and apogee of Romeo's sensory experience,

as corporeal and spiritual in a way that corresponds strikingly to Romeo's last moments with

Juliet:

> at the moment of holy communion, we receive the bridegroom's limbs, caress and
> embrace them, press them to our heart with our eyes, imagine a kind of embrace
> believe ourselves to be with him, embrace him, caress him, love driving out fear. [106]

Romeo's senses provide a conduit between body and soul, allowing him to experience and,

for the purposes of dramatic form, to show that moment of mystical encounter.

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[106] Theodoret of Cyrus's *Commentary on The Song of Songs* I.30 from*, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ed. by John Robert Wright, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. Old Testament, 9, [1st printing in paperback] (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2005), pp. 291–92.

Theodoret's description of Holy Communion is particularly relevant to Romeo's soliloquy, which I earlier described as a confession and viaticum. Theodoret insists that when the *Song of Song's* bride declares 'Let him kiss me with kisses of his mouth' she is not referring to 'the joining of mouths but the communion of pious soul and divine Word'. She wishes to receive the Word of God directly from his mouth, without intermediaries, 'she wishes to caress it with the lips of [her] mind'.[107]

We can imagine that Romeo performs all of his instructions; the examination, the embrace, and concluding with the kiss, which would require the pause offered at the end of the line 'A dateless bargain to engrossing death.' (5.3.115) After this, Romeo turns his thoughts towards suicide, invoking a nautical metaphor, in which he imagines himself as a sea-tossed boat, piloted by Death towards 'the dashing rocks' (5.3.122), a metaphor which might allude to the tale of Cleombrotus, who, in an attempt to reach the spirit world, casts himself into the ocean.[108]

Romeo's final moment develops into a grotesque self-destructive eucharist, made more deliberate and ritualistic if he decants the poison, which becomes a type of sacrament, into a cup, as T.J.B. Spencer has suggested. It is, perhaps, better described as a viaticum, part of the rites of death which provides 'viage provision of Christen men departing oute off this world'.[109] The etymology of viaticum, relating as it does to a pathway, further helps us to understand the poison as more than merely a method of suicide by enabling the final step of Romeo's *via mystica* and the foretelling of an onward journey in the afterlife.

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[107] Ibid., pp. 291–92.

[108] Cleombrotus is discussed by John Donne and Michel de Montaigne in the following: John Donne, *Biathanatos*, ed. by Michael Rudick and Pabst Battin (New York and London: Garland, 1982), p. 189 and Michel de Montaigne, *Complete Essays*, trans. by Donald M. Frame (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 260.

[109] Thomas Stapleton, *A Fortresse of the faith first planted amonge vs Englishmen*, (Antwerp: Ihon Laet,1565).

When Juliet awakens from the effects of the sleeping potion, she is informed that her Romeo is dead. Friar Laurence, who relates the news, attempts to manage the tragic situation and proposes to 'dispose' of her 'Among a sisterhood of holy nuns' (5.3.157). The Friar's panicked rambling denies Juliet the opportunity to vocalise her shock, but this allows a reiteration of Juliet's maturity, a sense of acceptance, perhaps even a satisfaction. Her death is a brief echo of Romeo's, and equally cataphatic. She declares her intention to stay with him; she examines him and notices the empty cup and chides him for leaving 'no friendly drop' (5.3.163). The poisonous sacrament has been used up. Her attempt to draw the remnants of poison from Romeo's lips returns her to the mystical kiss. Juliet's death mirrors a pattern of sexual intimacy, a kiss followed by the penetration of Romeo's dagger, which Juliet invites 'This is thy sheath; there rust, and let me die' (5.3.170).

Romeo and Juliet achieve a secularised *unio mystica*. It seems that the oxymora that form such an important part of the play's language operate within a more central tension, through the course and expression of devotion. My earlier reference to David Lucking's assertion that Shakespeare employs oxymora as a pivot of transformation in which, for example, hate *becomes* love, seems to acquire a new relevance. Through mystical allusion, profane devotion and desire are transformed into something sacred, or at least they take on the patina of sanctity. This sanctifying transformation can be seen in the elevation of Juliet, in the self-abnegating acts of marriage and sexual union and the resurrection following the mimetic deaths of Romeo's banishment and Juliet's sleeping potion.

Romeo and Juliet transform from temporal to spiritual articles through an iterative, experimental process in which time is repeatedly suspended through moments of union. Indeed, the exploration of time itself might be considered as a marker of mysticism. As Patricia Dailey explains, 'mystical texts are riddled by different forms of temporal expression' which situate the 'chronological or historical' within the 'atemporal or eternal, a

time outside of time, the time of God, which is not subject to change or to mediation and remains identical with itself'.[110]

Romeo and Juliet's obsession with time is widely acknowledged in the play's critical discourse, but it is perhaps often limited to how time, be it temporal or eternal, propels the protagonists towards a tragedy in which time ceases. Ramie Targoff's argument that Romeo and Juliet's love cannot cross into eternity is a case in point. This line of argument perhaps fails to read the text's mystical signposts, which point towards a *unio mystica*. This chapter's analysis reveals how a broad humanist understanding of death as a tragedy has buried the triumph of Romeo and Juliet's Christian mystical project. It shows how reading the play alongside mystical texts sheds new light on the language, narrative, and characters of the play. A more positive understanding of Romeo and Juliet emerges, in which they adopt the role as pilgrims travelling towards a desired secularised union. Their frequent attempts to achieve this union, through marriage, sex and, ultimately, death, reveal a sense of their determination and agency. Their *cupio dissolvi* is a desire to dissolve as individuals and reconstitute as an eternal, immutable entity. In the play's final moments, the Prince describes Romeo and Juliet's deaths as the most woeful story, but *cupio dissolvi* allows us to acknowledge the tragedy of their deaths alongside its triumph.

The next chapter, which explores *The Rape of Lucrece,* develops the theme of female agency and authorship through a process of self-destructive renewal but their dissolutions are towards different ends: Juliet dissolves into an eternal union with Romeo; Lucrece dissolves into the linguistic structures of Rome, as a self-authored symbol of defiance and honour.

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[110] Patricia Dailey, 'Time and Memory', in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. by Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman, 1st edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 341–50 (p. 341).

THE RAPE OF LUCRECE:
EMBLEM, AGENCY, AND AUTHORSHIP

This chapter offers a close reading of Shakespeare's poem *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). My objective is to reveal the poem's self-destructive moments as linguistic articles, bound to notions of selfhood as it exists within and beyond a culture of symbols. In previous chapters, my method has focused on a theological exploration of Shakespeare's engagement with notions of self-destructive renewal, which I organised around the principle of *cupio dissolvi*. I surveyed the early modern use of this phrase to provide an analytical framework by which I could reveal manifestations of the theme in Shakespeare's plays and poems. This chapter is a continuation of that argument, but an adjustment in the methodological approach, which turns from a Christian reading of Shakespeare's plays to the theories of Jacques Lacan. In its approach, the chapter is intended to function as an outlier, exploring the theme of self-destructive renewal in Shakespeare through a seemingly divergent analytical framework. This approach initially promises to demonstrate how Shakespeare's *cupio dissolvi* may be analysed and understood through an ostensibly secular theoretical framework. As described in the Introduction to this thesis, Lacan's concepts resonate with a sense of the ineffable divine. Whatever balance is struck between the secular and sacred, this chapter offers a new way of understanding Shakespeare's self-destructive renewal. The function of Lacan's theories in this analysis lies in their capacity to illuminate how the poem constructs selfhood and its dissolution through the dynamics of Lacan's symbolic, imaginary and real orders. The orders reveal the construction of self as inherently conflicted and unstable. The advantage of this instability is that it allows Shakespeare to challenge and interrogate the ostensibly immutable principles of early modern culture.

The use of Lacan's theories is mostly limited to his concept of the symbolic, imaginary, and real, although I do mention other relevant theories. After contextualising the critical response to *The Rape of Lucrece,* I will outline the most salient Lacanian theories and build on these through my exploration of the poem. The analysis follows the chronology of the poem and uses Lacan to reveal how Tarquin's rape of Lucrece and her subsequent suicide relate to the symbolic world of Rome. I explain how Shakespeare's *Romanitas*, the spirit or ideals of ancient Rome, can be understood through Lacan's symbolic order and how this establishes the preconditions of understanding the subsequent events as linguistic events.

I.   The Critical Response to *The Rape of Lucrece*

Central to this reading of *The Rape of Lucrece* is the understanding that the violent destruction that drives the narrative of the poem incites an act of agency and authorship. This chapter follows the broader argument of the thesis, that corporeal dissolution leads to a spiritual or, in the case of Tarquin and Lucrece, symbolic reconstitution. To make this argument requires a clear separation between Lucrece's rape and her suicide. There has been a tendency, which I will expand on, to regard the suicide as another shameful and tragic episode. To appreciate the scope of reading Lucrece's suicide positively, as an act of agency, it is necessary to consider its critical context.

Scholarship has been somewhat divided between the personal and political significance of the poem. Political interpretations see the rape of Lucrece as the instigator of

political change, the destruction of monarchy and its replacement with republicanism.[1] Colin Burrow suggests that after Augustine's *City of God* was translated and printed in 1610, the dominant debate swung towards the personal, resting on Augustine's contention that if Lucrece was unwilling of the rape, she was not guilty and thus wrongfully killed herself; or that 'she herself consented, seduced by her own lust' and, as such, was correctly punished.[2] In addition to the consent debate, Augustine develops another pernicious notion, that Lucrece was overly concerned with reputation, expressed in both her rhetoric and suicide. Through this, Augustine creates a dialectic between Pagan shame and Christian conscience.

In the 1950s and early 60s, scholarly opinion resurrected the perspective of Augustine's sententious suspicions of Lucrece, undermining her sexual assault with doubt. Sam Hynes declared that 'the significant rape is the rape of Tarquin's soul'. Hynes' position risks diverting focus from and trivialising the *actual* rape that takes place.[3] Don Cameron Allen judged Lucrece 'a little beyond forgiveness', which seems unaccountably cruel, but corresponds, he seems to suggest, to the prevailing early modern perspective on suicide.[4] Battenhouse explains that the 'multiple ironies of human self-delusion (intensified by a feminine proclivity to self-pity and evasive argument) are here Shakespeare's tragic theme.' He goes on to complain that 'we have been shown martyrdom in an obscene mode, a religious "dying" which Shakespeare hints, figuratively, is a kind of masturbatory self-rape.'[5] Hynes and Cameron-Allen seem over-interested in the carnal urges of Tarquin, indeed over-

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[1] See Michael Platt, "'*The Rape of Lucrece*' And the Republic for Which It Stands." *The Centennial Review* 19, no. 2 (1975), 59–79; Peter Smith, "Rome's Disgrace: The Politics of Rape in Shakespeare's '*Lucrece*.'" *Critical Survey* 17. 3 (2005), 15–26; John Kunat, 'Rape and Republicanism in Shakespeare's '*Lucrece*.'' *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 55. 1 (2015), p. 1-20.

[2] Augustine, *Augustine*: *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. by R.W. Dyson, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 30.

[3] Sam Hynes, 'The Rape of Tarquin', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 10.3 (1959), 451 (p. 451).

[4] D. C. Allen, 'Some Observations on "The Rape of Lucrece"', in *Shakespeare Survey*, 15 (1962), pp. 89–98 (p. 91).

[5] Roy W. Battenhouse, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Its Art and Its Christian Premises*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 28.

interested in all that concerns Tarquin. F.T. Prince, Arden's editor of *The Rape of Lucrece* for

their 1960 edition, also cast the poem, and specifically Lucrece's role, in a disparaging light.

He regarded the poem 'overlong, confused and morbid'.[6] Prince seemed to require a clarity

that would obviate the poem's prolixity, particularly of Lucrece's complaint, and divest it of

moral ambiguities.

The poem's neglect and disparagement yielded in the early 1980s to a more

sympathetic and dynamic feminist reading. Coppelia Kahn's foundational essay, 'The Rape

in Shakespeare's 'Lucrece'' and Laura Bromley's excellent 'Lucrece's Re-Creation' pursue a

feminist reading of the text, well-articulated here by Vickers:

> In Lucrece, occasion, rhetoric, and result are all informed by, and thus inscribe, a
> battle between men that is first figuratively and then literally fought on the fields of
> woman's "celebrated" body.[7]

Feminist readings lifted the accusation of blame that had obscured much of the most valuable

attributes of the poem, revealing how female agency can operate within patriarchal cultures

and how such agency offers a dynamic challenge to patriarchal hegemony; as Bromley

asserts, 'within the terms set out by Shakespeare's poem, Lucrece's suicide is a positive,

constructive, and self-creative act.'[8] This reading reveals a notion of Lucrece's agency that

seems to invert traditional assumptions regarding her suicide, a reading that expresses notions

of self, and with it, self-destruction, as central to the value of the poem.

Carolyn D. Williams maintains that Lucrece's violated body is caught in the middle of

a male-male transaction.[9] This notion, according to Julia Rudolph, offers 'a traditional

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[6] William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Poems: Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece, and the Shorter Poems*, ed. by Katherine Duncan Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2007), p. 79.
[7] Nancy J. Vickers, 'The Blazon of Sweet Beauty's Best'', in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. by Geoffrey Hartman and Patricia A. Parker (London: Taylor & Francis, 1986), p. 96.
[8] Laura G. Bromley, 'Lucrece's Re-Creation', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 34.2 (1983), 200–211 (p. 211).
[9] Carolyn D. Williams, '"Silence, like a Lucrece Knife": Shakespeare and the Meanings of Rape', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 23 (1993), pp. 93 - 110 (p. 108).

understanding of women as subordinate to men and an understanding of rape as a violation of a species of male property.'[10] While Williams seems to relinquish the gains made by Bromley's argument, she expertly steers this transaction away from a mercantile exchange towards a more nuanced exploration of gender, considering the nature of cuckolding as a 'sexual act performed by one man upon another'.[11] Her analysis exposes the poem's disruption of conventional gender roles. She considers the central position of language and its containment, concerning Lucrece and Lavinia, as 'inducements to concealment and silence, and the subtler pressures that make women's words ineffectual or meaningless if unsupported by self-destruction'.[12] On the other hand, Bromley argues that Lucrece's act of self-destruction (her suicide) is a powerful and creative act. It gives meaning to her otherwise powerless situation and language. In essence, Bromley sees her self-destruction as a way for Lucrece to regain control and agency. Her suicide is the 'constructive and self-creative' punctuation of Lucrece's tragic and otherwise ineffectual language.

Rudolph and Garthine Walker are particularly useful in helping to historicise the language of rape. Walker details a number of sixteenth-century rape cases, noting the tightrope of language use for women seeking justice: too much aggression, too much explicit sexual reference, too much self-defence taints the 'positive image of woman as the suffering victim which had cultural potency, and which evoked a certain pathos.'[13]

It seems that selfhood through language, and the important notion of consent, is a fundamental aspect of a reading of *The Rape of Lucrece* that offers insight into cultural and political realities of early modern England and illuminates modern understandings of the

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[10] Julia Rudolph, 'Rape and Resistance: Women and Consent in Seventeenth-Century English Legal and Political Thought', *Journal of British Studies*, 39.2 (2000), 157–84 (p. 161).
[11] Williams, p. 108.
[12] Ibid., p. 110.
[13] Garthine Walker, 'Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early Modern England', *Gender & History*, 10.1 (1998), 1–25 (p. 10).

linguistic and symbolic nature of gender and consent in both personal and political terms.

Barbara Baines moves the discussion in this direction by considering the ambivalence of the

early modern legal system, wanting 'to have it both ways' for rape to be treated as 'a crime

against property and as a crime against the person'. Baines goes on to argue that this position

'reveals a crisis in the early modern construction of women's subjectivity: she is both

property or passive object and a person invested with agency, with the will and discernment

that define consent.'[14]

Bromley's assertion that Lucrece's suicide is 'positive and constructive' identifies the

inherent power of Lucrece's self-destruction, despite others decrying it as 'the ultimate

consent to patriarchal imperatives.'[15] Baines takes a different approach, focusing on the

representation of rape and its aftermath. She argues that rape belongs to the register of

experiences, images, and memories and is thus beyond depiction, whereas a bleeding form is

the *corpus delicti* (the body of evidence) and concludes that through 'the metaphoricity of

that suicide, the unrepresentable and effaced rape returns as the real.'[16] Both Bromley and

Baines offer divergent accounts of Lucrece's suicide as a symbol within the patriarchal

framework. Bromley posits that suicide for Lucrece is an act of empowerment within the

context of a male-dominated society, a way for Lucrece to assert control over her narrative.

Baines, however, focuses on the representational aspect—how the physical act of suicide

makes the trauma of rape, which is difficult to fully depict or comprehend, become real and

tangible. Essentially, while Bromley emphasises the personal agency and constructive power

of the act, Baines highlights its symbolic role in making the invisible trauma of rape visible

and indubitable.

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[14] Barbara J. Baines, 'Effacing Rape in Early Modern Representation', *ELH*, 65.1 (1998), 69–98 (pp. 72–73).
[15] Ibid., p. 89.
[16] Ibid., p. 90.

Baine's use of the term 'real' is significant in its linguistic and conceptual scope, connoting a thing that is not imagined or supposed but observable and appreciable. This is a different type of register than that described by Jacques Lacan, for whom the 'real' occupied such experiences as dying and rape, which lie beyond the scope of language. As such, a Lacanian reading amends Baines' observation, asserting that the 'effaced rape' is an article of the 'real' which has been returned to symbols by Lucrece's dead body, readable as a hieroglyph of trauma and resistance. It is a difficult and upsetting notion, that Lucrece's physical and emotional trauma should be usefully employed as a symbol, but this resistance perhaps comes from a way of thinking that presupposes a priority of the flesh in the present over the immutability of eternity, either as a soul or a symbol.

Although these contributions are each persuasive, they provide a litany of disjointed causes and effects: a homosocial powerplay, heterosexual male desire, the limitations of female expression, notions of consent and their broader social and political ramifications, self-fashioning and inevitably self-destruction, re-creation, and resurrection. All of these factors are operating in the poem, but the scope of an analysis of all of these aspects would be far too large for this chapter. Consequently, while these interpretations address various consequences of the rape in a broader thematic or symbolic sense, they may not fully grapple with the immediate and devastating emotional trauma that Lucrece endures, which is a fundamental and cataclysmic outcome of the event. This is most true for early modern readings of the poem, later analysis that adopted their sententiousness, but also the feminist readings of the last thirty years. Bromley's analysis, which emphasises the self-constructive nature of Lucrece's suicide, is the anomaly to the majority of other studies which have focused on the impact of social and political imperatives on individuals and largely overlook those individuals not only as products but as active agents of the social and political.

The contribution of Hynes, Cameron Allen, and Battenhouse, supported by the more recent efforts of Peter Smith, emphasises the damage done to Tarquin, while later feminist readings tend to pivot towards the damage done to Lucrece.[17] These readings suggest that the rape is motivated by a possessive desire belonging to the male world of rivalry and conquest. This argument finds support in the notion of memetic desire, as developed by René Girard who allows us to understand memetic desire as 'second-hand desire' which 'seeks to conquer the *being*, the essence, of his model by as faithful imitation as possible.'[18] Tarquin seeks to conquer the *being* of Lucrece's husband, Collatine. Indeed, there quickly develops a web of desire and imitation: Tarquin imitates and desires Collatine's desire for Lucrece. This position, supported by the likes of Carolyn Williams, should persuade us of the need to explore the shifts of sexuality and gender that Tarquin is navigating. Crucially, we must consider that Tarquin's challenge to Roman gender and sexuality, which can be perceived through his memetic desire, is a part of the self-destruction of himself or his *self* as a symbol of Rome.

The problem with this interpretation is that it overlooks Tarquin's charge towards certain ruin - or attempts to explain it as a simple act of lust and cupidity. It understates the sense that this act will tear apart all that Tarquin is and belongs to. Tarquin seems aware of this when he says, 'I have debated, even in my soul, /What wrong, what shame, what sorrow I shall breed' (498-99), and the evidence mounts throughout the first third of the poem. Attributing Tarquin's rape of Lucrece simply to lust and rivalry becomes problematic and unsatisfying. Tarquin's lust is explicit, his rivalry may be inferred but neither seems solid enough to explain the damage he will cause. The motivation that sits beneath these ostensible

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[17] Peter J. Smith, 'Exonerating Rape: Pornography as Exculpation in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*', *Shakespeare*, 5.4 (2009), 407–22.

[18] René Girard, *'To Double Business Bound': Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 3.

inducements is destruction itself, operating linguistically and symbolically, a hidden desire for dissolution.

Catherine Belsey builds on what is suggested by Baines with a Lacanian reading which is rich, although frustratingly brief:

> The poem's image of Tarquin beside himself, slave to an insatiable desire beyond the reach of Law, is strangely Lacanian [...] In a manner that closely resembles Jacques Lacan's doomed, desiring subject, in command of everything but its own desire [...] the king's son, dissatisfied with what he already possesses wants precisely what, because it is forbidden, will destroy him and all he already has.[19]

Within this image of Lacan's 'doomed, desiring subject', which conjures a legion of early modern protagonists, Belsey introduces the valuable Lacanian ideas of law, which here pertains as much to the 'symbolic order' as to law and order, and insatiability. Belsey suggests that Tarquin's desire is aroused by the forbiddance of Lucrece. Lucrece is Eve-like, the essence of prohibition and thus the primary target of Tarquin's destructive desire. Belsey's significant intervention has the potential to address the shortcomings of earlier contributions by providing a nexus in which a multitude of elements may be considered at once. Belsey's argument also offers a more satisfactory motive to Tarquin's actions.

Philippa Berry addresses the failure of previous feminist analyses to explore how Lucrece represents 'any contradiction, any *aporia,* within patriarchal discourse.'[20] Berry's analysis of Lucrece's language, not as silenced or limited but assertive, even seizing 'control of history, rather than remaining its passive victim'[21] may be productively enlivened by a Lacanian reading. Such a reading reveals the politics of self-destruction and, beyond the rape, Lucrece's agency as an author of the 'symbolic'. Berry's analysis reimagines the destructive

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[19] Catherine Belsey, 'Tarquin Dispossessed: Expropriation and Consent in *The Rape of Lucrece*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 52.3 (2001), 315–35 (p. 323).
[20] Philippa Berry, 'Woman, Language, and History in *The Rape of Lucrece*', in *Shakespeare Survey*, 44 (1991), pp. 33–40 (p. 33).
[21] Ibid., p. 38.

act of rape against the constructive act of Lucrece's suicide and how they operate within, against and in support of a linguistic social code. Ann Kaegi asserts that 'Tarquin's passionate tyranny must be quelled, and communal norms of justice enforced to prevent further abuses of power.'[22] While I agree that Tarquin's tyranny is an abuse of power, it is also an abuse *against* power. It challenges the reputation and conscience of the state and destabilises both the notion and fabric of Rome. What Kaegi calls 'communal norms' is fundamental to understanding the structural concerns of the poem, the conditions that shape Tarquin and Lucrece's symbolic value and the boundaries that they challenge. In the highly structured Rome of the English Renaissance imagination, these boundaries and the norms and values that they protect are understood as *Romanitas*.

II.   *Romanitas* and Lacan's 'Symbolic Order'

Shakespeare's Roman plays and poems belong to an early modern conception of Rome, a *Romanitas*, that has been subject to an abundance of critical inquiry. T.J.B Spencer asserts that Shakespeare's conception of Rome drew praise from the likes of poets Nahum Tate, John Dryden and Alexander Pope for its 'veracity or authenticity'.[23] Early twentieth-century scholarly interest started with M. W. MacCallum's influential book on Shakespeare's Roman Plays, and continued throughout the century and into the next.[24] According to the literary scholar Domenico Lovascio, this resulted in, 'possibly the highest instantiation of the early

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[22] Ann Kaegi, 'Passionate Uprisings in Shakespeare's *Lucrece*', *Shakespeare*, 14.3 (2018), 205–15 (p. 209).
[23] Terence Spencer, 'Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans', in *Shakespeare Survey* (1957), pp. 27–38 (p. 27).
[24] M. MacCallum, *Shakespeare's Roman Plays* (London: Macmillan, 1967); See, Domenico Lovascio, 'Introduction: Visions of Rome in Shakespeare', *Shakespeare*, 15.4 (2019), 311–15 (p. 313).

modern engagement with the incendiary potentialities inherent in any creative negotiations with and appropriations of the Roman past in literature or culture.'[25]

While Lovascio goes on to make clear that there is no single version of Shakespearean *Romanitas*, he concedes that 'Shakespeare's Roman world has its own distinct identity.'[26] This identity is complicated by the shifting political landscapes of Shakespeare's Roman plays. Spencer identifies three transitional phases, but because his essay focuses on plays, he overlooks *Lucrece*, which offers valuable imaginative insight into the traumatic conclusion of the Kingdom of Rome. The image of Rome is further complicated by Shakespeare's understanding of Rome as a Renaissance city, a 'land of love, lust, revenge, intrigue and art'[27] and finally, Rome as the Holy See, the 'locus of forbidden devotion and prohibited practice, city of saints, heretics, martyrs and miracles.'[28] These versions of Rome operate in *The Rape of Lucrece* as a dialectic between a rigid Roman honour code and the propensity for individuals to fall towards, or actively pursue, the licentious and prohibited. Tarquin's fall, or to reshape the metaphor in anticipation of my argument and the poem's language, his 'blotting', is actively pursued and thus provides a more satisfactory motivation for his destructive actions.[29] A more detailed understanding of the 'communal norms,' the *Romanitas* of 'Lucrece', will be revealed by close reading of the poem; its articulation of estimable attributes, often exposed by the degree of deviation from such attributes.

The transmission of *Romanitas* is central to understanding *The Rape of Lucrece* and best served through a methodology that explores the relationship between culture and language, image and experience. The spread of *Romanitas*, its appropriation and its inherent

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[25] Ibid., p. 311.
[26] Ibid., p. 312.
[27] Robert S. Miola, 'Past the Size of Dreaming? Shakespeare's Rome', in *Shakespeare Survey*, 69 (2016), pp. 1–16 (p. 1).
[28] Ibid., p. 1.
[29] 'Blot' is a keyword in this chapter's analysis. It is frequently used in the poem and suggests the literary world in which Lucrece authors her ongoing symbolic identity.

mutability has been largely misunderstood, often reducing Lucrece to a mere symbolic product of patriarchy and, as I have said, wrongly attributing Tarquin's sexual assault of Lucrece to lust or rivalry. Tarquin and Lucrece use their self-destruction to defiantly 'blot' and rewrite the 'symbolic order' of *Romanitas*. I am particularly keen to explore how Lacan's notion of the death drive can illuminate Tarquin's motivation, which has been inadequately addressed in previous accounts, and how Lucrece's suicide transcends an '*aporia* within patriarchal discourse' to a revision *of* the discourse.[30]

Before the analysis of the poem begins, a few preliminary explanations are necessary: an outline of the 'self-consciously paradoxical, oxymoronic style' of Lacanian theory, its context in early modern literary scholarship, and an indication of my intended focus and route through the poem. [31] There is a remoteness between Lacan and his reader which has developed through the ambiguity of his theory. I acknowledge this in my use of Lacan, which is a received version of his theory, modified through its translation and dissemination. Lacanian theory itself belongs to an unstable confluence of disciplines and positions. Yannis Stavrakakis explains that 'the whole Lacanian enterprise was influenced by structural linguistics and structural anthropology' but warns against labelling the theory as structuralist or post-structuralist, which would deny the scope of his work and its evolution.[32]He goes on to explain that while Lacanian theory exhibits elements of both structuralism and post-structuralism it goes beyond these categories, especially when considering notions of *jouissance*, and the real. Lacan's three registers, or orders, were developed and revised over a thirty-year period and are thus prone to contradiction and complication. Philip Armstrong

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[30] Berry, 'Woman, Language, and History in *The Rape of Lucrece*', p. 33.
[31] E. A. Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: a Feminist Introduction* (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 147.
[32] Yannis Stavrakakis, *Lacan and the Political*, Thinking the Political (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 144.

produces a useful starting point that reveals Lacan's Freudian influence and demonstrates some of the ambiguity and reach of these positions:

> The relation to the mother (*real*) gives way to narcissistic fantasy (*imaginary*) which in turn gives way to the Oedipal complex and its resolution in castration anxiety (*symbolic*).[33]

To unravel this definition: the 'symbolic' is the structuralist notion of established 'communal norms', values, laws, and codes of a given culture, perpetuated through its language. [34] The 'symbolic' is the father and authority; the position, also, against which to rebel and resist. The 'imaginary' is the way an individual constructs or performs an identity, it is the self in response to the 'symbolic'. The 'real' is pre-Oedipal, it is the source of ineffable urges and impulses and, as Lacan argues, the place to which we long to return. As I indicated in the introduction to this chapter, this is the Lacanian equivalent of the divine.

Lacanian theory has made a significant contribution to literary study, particularly as part of structuralist and post-structuralist discourses. But Shirley Sharon-Zisser and Douglas Brooks' *Lacanian Interpretations of Shakespeare* is unique in its focus on the intersection of Lacan and Shakespeare. Within this work, a chapter by Kelly McGuire on early modern subjectivities is particularly useful to this chapter. Richard Halpern's book *Shakespeare's Perfume* explores Lacan's borrowed theory of *Das Ding,* the unobtainable or forbidden object of desire, which Lacan later replaces with the term *objet petit a*.[35] Valerie Traub's analysis of desire in Shakespeare corresponds to the Lacanian *objet petit a.* She asserts, 'desire is always, (1) a matter of both minds and bodies; (2) implicated in interpretive networks, signifying systems, discursive fields; and (3) substitutive, founded on a lack, and hence, always the

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[33] Philip Armstrong, *Shakespeare in Psychoanalysis*, Accents on Shakespeare (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 70.
[34] Kaegi, p. 209.
[35] Richard Halpern, *Shakespeare's Perfume: Sodomy and Sublimity in the Sonnets, Wilde, Freud, and Lacan*, New Cultural Studies (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

desire for the other.'[36] If we apply Traub's position on Shakespearean desire alongside Lacan we can see that the object cause of Tarquin's desire, his *objet petit a,* is Lucrece. She is the solid, signifying form of his incompleteness, and through her defilement and destruction he too will be destroyed and return to symbolic freedom and wholeness of 'self'.

The structure of *The Rape of Lucrece* is a literary version of the sequence of Lacan's three orders. The first section establishes the 'symbolic order' through its symbols and estimable attributes, its *Romanitas*. Tarquin's struggle to control his desire provides a further articulation of and deviation from *Romanitas*. This unit concludes with the rape of Lucrece and Tarquin's flight. The second section turns the focus to Lucrece and her attempts to comprehend her grief. She does this by contemplating a tapestry which depicts the fall of Troy; here Shakespeare provides an extended example of ekphrasis.[37] Lucrece can understand herself within a differential schema. In the painting, she is provided with a reflection of her grief and a foretelling of her future. The third and final section deals with her suicide and its impact. It is the ineffable 'real' of Lacan's triumvirate.

III. 'For in thy bed I purpose to destroy thee.'

At the opening of *The Rape of Lucrece*, Shakespeare establishes the notion of a frustrated conquest, Tarquin and his men encamped at Ardea after a failed assault which has led the Roman army 'to starve the enemy out'.[38] The impotence of Tarquin's failed attack seems an antecedent to his lust for Lucrece. Shame and failure already aroused, the measure of Tarquin's *Romanitas,* the code of Roman honour*,* is found wanting.

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[36] Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 7.

[37] Ekphrasis (Noun) a literary device in which a painting, or other work of visual art is described in detail OED. Is this a quotation from the OED? If so, use quote marks.

[38] Livy and others, *The Early History of Rome: Books I-V of The History of Rome from Its Foundations*, (London; New York: Penguin Books, 2002).

George K. Hunter defines *Romanitas* as 'a set of virtues, thought of as characterising Roman civilisation – soldierly, severe, self-controlled, self-disciplined'; a martial code, frequently embodied by Shakespeare's Roman warriors.[39] It is imbued with notions of masculinity, service, and self-sacrifice. Titus, for example, declares, 'Rome, I have been thy soldier forty years' (*Titus Andronicus*, 1.1.196), serving as man and boy in service to both the state and concept of Rome. Octavius, when ordering the care of the dead body of Brutus, instructs 'Within my tent his bones tonight shall lie, / Most like a soldier, ordered honourably' (*Julius Caesar*, 5.5.80). Manuel Tröster, when discussing Plutarch's understanding of *mos maiorum,* a term that relates to *Romanitas*, posits another dimension, a 'devotion [and] priority accorded to public over private concerns.'[40] It is here that Shakespeare's tragic Roman heroes so often fall foul of their code of honour: Caesar crosses the Rubicon, Antony enjoys the 'soft hours' with Cleopatra (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.1.45), and Tarquin rapes Lucrece. These failed Romans prioritise their urges over their social code.

While Hölkeskamp and Heitmann-Gordon's description of the political culture of Rome could have been inspired by any number of structuralist or poststructuralist theorists, it is particularly useful here in drawing together the central concerns of Lacanian theory, which I will detail in my subsequent analysis, and *Romanitas*:

> Symbolic, affective, and aesthetic dimensions that together underwrite, permanently reproduce, and renew the legitimacy of the political system on the 'surface' and ensure its acceptance by assuring its "meaning" and sense. It also confirms affiliations, generates compliance, grounds and maintains a collective identity of a group – and this is a fundamental function of political culture, understood as a "language of legitimation".[41]

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[39] G. K. Hunter "A Roman Thought: Renaissance Attitudes to History Exemplified in Shakespeare and Jonson," in, An *English Miscellany: Presented to W. S. Mackie*, ed. by Brian S. Lee and William Soutar Mackie (Cape Town; New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 94.

[40] For a definition of *mos maiorum* see, Karl-Joachim Hölkeskamp and Henry Heitmann-Gordon, *Reconstructing the Roman Republic: An Ancient Political Culture and Modern Research* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 19; Troster, Manuel, 'Plutarch and Mos Maiorum in the Life of Aemilius Paullus', *Ancient Society*, 42, 2012, pp. 219–254 (p. 225).

[41] Hölkeskamp and Heitmann-Gordon, p. 55.

As this passage suggests, *Romanitas* is more than a rulebook; it is a producer and filter of language, and by extension, of thought. It is Tarquin's 'symbolic order' and the 'bearing' from which we might measure his deviation. When Tarquin 'leaves the Roman host' (3), we might imagine the double meaning: leaving his comrades and a yet more profound departure from his culture.

The second stanza of the poem contrasts Tarquin's lust with Lucrece's chastity. Lucrece is described as a Pandora's box of treasures, opened and boasted of by the unwitting Collatine, and whose celestial beauty is another Ardea, although undefended and unprepared. This conversation takes place at night in Tarquin's tent and evokes a scene reminiscent of the Egyptian court in which Antony, another lapsed Roman, falls into epicurean delights: he 'fishes, drinks, and wastes/ The lamps of night in revel' (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.4.4-5). As a litany of Tarquin's 'symbolic order', Shakespeare writes, 'His honour, his affairs, his friends, his state/Neglected all' (45/6). The shame of Tarquin's lust is further compounded by abandonment of his duty to his comrades and a rejection of his rank and culture.

Lucrece is also presented as a symbol of the 'symbolic order' of *Romanitas*. Shakespeare refers to the virtue of Lucrece six times in the eighth to tenth stanzas of the poem before elevating her to 'earthly saint' (85). Christianity provides a subterranean current of language and symbols to Shakespeare's construction of a pagan Roman world. In contradistinction to Lucrece's saintliness (a notable likeness to Shakespeare's Juliet) Tarquin is seen as the devil, disguising his destructive desire, itself disguised as lust, beneath the 'pleats of majesty' (93). This contrast deepens as Tarquin's assault on Lucrece emerges as a symbolic attack on the very ideals of *Romanitas* that she and Collatine embody. Tarquin celebrates Collatine's 'fame' and 'manly chivalry', and how his 'high name' is 'made glorious' by his exploits (109). Lucrece and Collatine are thus established as symbols of

Romanitas and so, in Tarquin's 'death drive', the destruction of Lucrece, perhaps a proxy for his destruction of Collatine and himself, constitutes a destruction of the 'symbolic order'.

Shakespeare reveals Tarquin tormented and trading with the invisible force of his desire, 'pawning his honour to obtain his lust' (156). The scale of his conflict is revealed in the succeeding line: 'And for himself himself must forsake' (157). The repetition of 'himself' not only conveys a sense of Tarquin's turmoil but places emphasis on 'self'. To free himself, Tarquin must abandon his *self*, and as he is composed of, indeed, *is* the 'symbolic order', what Tarquin is doing here is untethering his 'symbolic' self in the hope of a reunion with the pre-Oedipal self of the 'real'. Tarquin is not ignorant to the consequences of his actions; he is 'pale with fear…And in his inward mind he doth debate / What following sorrow may on this arise' (185-6). A Lacanian reading presupposes that Tarquin knowingly pursues the consequences, that he desires not only the body of Lucrece and her symbolic destruction, the ruin of her reputation, but also the dismantling of his *self* and, with it, the entire world order. A useful ambiguity is developed between Tarquin's point of address; is he commanding his torch to 'burn out' or longing for death? His following command seems to develop the latter, as he orders his thoughts to die before they 'blot…that which is divine' (193). These lines might lead the reader to a conclusion that Tarquin is wrestling with his lustful thoughts and recognising the permanent damage that his actions will have on Lucrece. On the other hand, perhaps Lucrece is not the 'divine' object but merely the *objet petit a,* the tangible form of Tarquin's lack, in the Lacanian sense, which is an incompleteness that, like *cupio dissolvi,* can only be resolved through his dissolution. The 'symbolic order' is again delineated:

> O shame to knighthood and to the shining arms!
> O foul dishonour to my household's grave!
> O impious act including all foul harms!
> A martial man to be soft fancy's slave!
> True valour still a true respect should have;
> Then my digression is so vile, so base,
> That it will live engraven in my face.

(197-203)

Tarquin presents himself with the violation of all aspects of the Roman honour code, both the *Romanitas* of living honour and the *mos maiorum* of the ancestral shame that his act will produce. He laments his emasculated status, once a 'martial man' and now a slave to 'soft fancy'. Mark Breitenberg explains that 'masculine desire is exercised in the name of conquest, possession and domination, but it also overthrows reason and leads to destructive excess.' [42] Integral to the destruction of Tarquin's *self* is his loss of masculinity, 'love and desire effeminize inasmuch as they overthrow masculine reason.'[43] The 'symbolic order' is, in more than one way, self-defeating; promoting a desire for invasion and occupation but ceding self-control to that desire.

The final couplet of the stanza seems to suggest that his disgrace will live, written in his face. His terrible defiance of the 'symbolic order' through self-destruction is a death that surely exists within and beyond a biological cessation of life; it is the annihilation of *self* as it exists in the culture of language and symbols. Ancestral shame weighs on Tarquin's mind as he anticipates his scandal's dissemination into the culture he desires to defy. 'A herald' he imagines:

> Some loathsome dash the herald will contrive
> To cipher me how fondly I did dote,
> That my posterity, shamed with the note,
> Shall curse my bones and hold it for no sin
> To wish that I their father had not been.
>
> (206 - 210)

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[42] Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, 1st edn (Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 99.
[43] Ibid., p. 99.

From the perspective of Lacanian theory, this stanza offers considerable illumination to Tarquin's construction and longed-for destruction of *self*. His understanding of the consequences of his planned assault on Lucrece is reinforced within the first line of the stanza, 'Yea, though I die the scandal will survive' (204). He moves towards his death unblinkered, desiring Lucrece and death itself. Tarquin also acknowledges, perhaps even narcissistically delights in, the eternal nature of his planned crime. *Mos maiorum* is woven into the fabric of the Roman 'symbolic order', tying individuals to a vast familial lineage, more so when the subject is a Prince. It allows Tarquin's 'death desire' to transcend the scope of his self by tainting his family with dishonour, from root to branch, adulterating memories and meddling with death and time.

Lacanian theory would place Tarquin's construction of self within the imaginary*,* which forms and renews within the 'symbolic'. The scope of what the self might become is shaped by the symbols, language, and rules of the 'symbolic order'. Tarquin's flight towards death, at least in a public way, is never linguistically or imaginatively free. Indeed, Tarquin writes his own version of his future self, existing in the curses of his shamed family. His imagined self is a product of *Romanitas*: measured unfavourably, and expressed in years to come within its cultural, linguistic framework. His crime will be 'cipher[ed]' and his dotage, his mental feebleness, against the stoicism of Roman thought, revealed.

Tarquin develops the notion that his planned act stretches beyond the temporal. He asks, 'What win I if I gain the thing I seek?' and answers, 'A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy' (211-12). His anticipation of the rape of Lucrece belongs, at least in part, to the Lacanian register of the 'real'*,* defying the past and present of the 'symbolic', occupying the fleeting, mutable moment. Jennifer Pacenza, when discussing embodied time, suggests that within Shakespeare's poetry, 'sex, death and time are interrelated.' She argues that 'the "dual unveiling" of death and orgasm allows […] Shakespeare to create a space that frees the body

from linear time.' [44] As Shakespeare tropes sex and death, so might we consider how a desire

for sex is, at least, a shared desire for death, by the temporary suspension of time through

orgasm, the loss of self as it mingles with another self and yet more temporally, the

consequences of the act itself, which for Tarquin, as he has acknowledged, will lead to his

death. It is a pattern that I explored previously in Romeo and Juliet's mystical path to

destructive renewal. The metaphorical language employed here - 'dream, breath, froth' -

peaks against the lure of the temporary, fleeting moments and conveys both the authority of

eternity and the inconsequentiality of the moment, and for that matter, mortal life. Tarquin's

crime is a threefold defiance of time: first, the act itself, from the rapacious perspective of

Tarquin, 'a froth of fleeting joy' (211), suspends time; second, it denigrates mortal time by

welcoming death; and finally, cognisant of the consequences it will provoke, the rape of

Lucrece will allow Tarquin to live on in infamy.

The adolescent rebellion of Tarquin's assault on the 'symbolic order' is expressed

explicitly when he declares 'Who fears a sentence or an old man's saw/ Shall by a painted

cloth be kept in awe' (244-5). There is a certain doubtfulness to his bluster. Duncan-Jones

and Woudhuysen note that a 'sentence' is a 'sententious…maxim' becoming a 'saw' when

over-used and that the 'painted cloth' is a visual equivalent.[45] In contrast to earlier

acknowledgements of the totality of his actions, Tarquin now seems to dismiss any

forthcoming reprimand as disapproval of a decrepit patriarchy, of the father. He is, perhaps,

attempting to calm his fears by denying the cataclysmic impact of pursuing his desire. He

sees that 'In a moment […] All pure effects' (251) will be confounded and killed. The

paradox, like that of 'death drive', is the self-destructive nature of the act. Tarquin seeks to

destroy the 'symbolic order' and yet his means of destruction belongs *to* it. He is an

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[44] *Shakespeare and Donne: Generic Hybrids and the Cultural Imaginary*, ed. by Judith H. Anderson and Jennifer C. Vaught, First edition (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 64.
[45] Shakespeare, Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen, *Shakespeare's Poems,* p. 259.

instrument of patriarchy. As Susan Brownmiller explains, 'men who commit rape have

served in effect as front-line masculine shock troops, terrorist guerrillas in the longest

sustained battle the world has ever known'.[46]

Through literary allusion, Tarquin's 'imaginary' *self* is developed. He is imagined as a

'night-owl' and 'lurking serpent' (360-2). But first, Tarquin becomes Narcissus:

> And how her hand, in my hand being lock'd
> Forced it to tremble with her loyal fear!
> Which struck her sad, and then it faster rock'd,
> Until her husband's welfare she did hear;
> Whereat she smiled with so sweet a cheer,
> That had Narcissus seen her as she stood,
> Self-love had never drown'd him in the flood.
>
> (260-66)

This allusion is complex. If Narcissus would find in Lucrece a beauty greater than in himself,

he would have been diverted from death. Tarquin's self-love, however, exceeds Narcissus;

despite Lucrece's beauty, he remains determined to drown. Indeed, it seems that Lucrece is

the water's film through which his desire is reflected. This aligns with the idea I previously

discussed that Tarquin's desire for death, whether through sexual violence or by severing the

symbolic order, is not about destroying his self, but about grasping the real. Tarquin feels

castrated by *Romanitas* and longs to destroy it, along with everything that has confined him.

He believes that by doing so, he can conceive another version of his self, one which can defy

death and achieve an infamous eternity, spreading his presence through the symbolic order.

This reveals a tension in Tarquin's actions: while he seeks to destroy the self, shaped by

Romanitas, he also strives to perpetuate a version of that self in defiance of death. This

contradiction highlights his complex relationship with the symbolic order and the real.

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[46] Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993), p. 257.

As Tarquin crosses the threshold of Lucrece's bedchamber, he is confronted by a series of 'forbiddings' (323): first, a gang of shrieking 'Night-wand'ring weasels' (307), in warning or perhaps solidarity with their fellow thief. As E. A. Armstong notes, 'Tarquin's objective is not the satiation of his lust; instead, he is driven by and towards terror, he 'pursues his fear' (308). We might speculate about the nature of his fear: discovery, shame, most likely an understanding of the scale of his crime and its destructive consequences. The natural world attempts to interrupt his pursuit. The second warning is the wind that 'wars with his torch' (311), and then the needle in Lucrece's discarded glove that pricks his finger. Tarquin takes these omens as trials against which his appetite is sharpened. He prays, 'as if the heavens should countenance his sin' (343), but realises that 'the powers to whom I pray abhor this fact' [his planned assault] (349), and so he rejects their authority and selects 'love and fortune' (351) as new gods. Tarquin's casual reordering of spiritual imperatives appears in *Antony and Cleopatra* when Cleopatra attempts to measure and control Antony's love, to which Antony declares 'Then must thou needs find out new heaven, new earth' (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.1.17). The rejection is of the 'symbolic order' against the 'real'. Love, for Antony, is a locus beyond illustration and expression. For Tarquin, although his understanding of love is a perversion of conventional meaning, it is perhaps synonymous with the 'real'. It is a dissolved space beyond and free from symbols and language.

Tarquin's notion of self is constructed in the 'imaginary order' against the ideals of *Romanitas*, which are typified by Lucrece. Shakespeare's ekphrastic presentation imagines Lucrece as a sacred effigy, and the embodiment of Roman honour and femininity. Her sleep prefigures her death and mingles with the erotic. Her body is the image of the 'symbolic'*,* crafted by the values of that culture. The language of this moment, the 'swelling', the 'bliss' (389-90), engage, voyeuristically, the 'lewd unhallowed eyes' (392) of Tarquin and the reader alike. Lucrece is a 'virtuous monument' (391) or to invert the metaphor, a monument

to virtue, a virtue that is an artifact of Rome. If Lucrece is the embodied notion of *Romanitas*,

her defilement is a rebellion against the political order. Mercedes Camino explains:

> woman is nothing other than the unlucky terrain where political struggles are fought
> and her sexuality the liminal space where a culture establishes its coordinates and
> fixes its boundaries.[47]

Camino's assertion of the political outcomes of the treatment of women is defined through

the metaphorical language of territory, discovery and invasion. Shakespeare writes of the

sleeping Lucrece as 'the map of death' (402), her breasts as 'ivory globes [...] unconquered'

(408), 'the heart of all her land' (439). The body of Lucrece is, as Camino suggests, a terrain

of political struggle, moreover, the map itself.

Tarquin's *death desire,* his *cupio dissolvi,* finally shakes off any previous euphemism,

explicitly acknowledging the cataclysmic consequences of his planned assault, and declaring,

'I have debated, even in my soul, / What wrong, what shame, what sorrow I shall breed'

(499). He appears to imagine a triple consequence of the rape, each an affront and challenge

to the 'symbolic'. He describes how 'nothing can affection's course control, / Or stop the

headlong fury of his speed' (500-1). 'Affection', like his earlier employment of 'love', feels

misplaced, even perverse, until the broader historical meaning of the word is revealed as

encompassing a 'controlling emotion' and even 'a feeling of animosity towards someone'.[48]

In personifying his desire, Tarquin seems demonically possessed and somewhat

absolved by the possession. A Roman, however, possesses himself. To return to Hunter's

description, Roman masculinity is 'soldierly, severe, self-controlled, self-disciplined'.[49]

Romanitas is a symbolic code that celebrates immutability and prescribes clear and limited

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[47] Mercedes Maroto Camino, '"The Map which deep impression bears": The Politics of Conquest in Shakespeare's Lucrece', *Shakespeare: World Views*, ed. by Heather Kerr, Robin Eaden, and Madge Mitton (Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1996), p. 139.
[48] 'Affection, n.1.' *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2020. Web. 7 October 2020.
[49] G. K. Hunter "A Roman Thought: Renaissance Attitudes to History Exemplified in Shakespeare and Jonson," in, An *English Miscellany: Presented to W. S. Mackie*, ed. by Brian S. Lee and William Soutar Mackie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 94.

boundaries of self-expression. Tarquin has allowed 'Fury' to assail his soul, which now steers its fate and parallels his planned assault of Lucrece. Sam Hynes asserts, 'The significant rape is the rape of Tarquin's soul', but in addition to Hynes' elevation of Tarquin's trauma, which potentially trivialises the actual rape of Lucrece, his interpretation seems to suggest that Tarquin is a victim of his own lust. His assault and its consequences are calculated, 'I know repentant tears ensue the deed, / Reproach, disdain, and deadly enmity;'. But against the 'deadly' costs, he is determined to depart, destroy and return to an eternal 'real' or at least construct an eternal image, 'Yet strive I to embrace mine infamy' (498-504).

Tarquin's possession and self-possession, his passivity and self-directed action, appear contradictory. Yet, Tarquin's possession simply reflects his obsessive drive toward destruction. Though he plunges headlong into the abyss, it is a leap he has willingly taken.

Lucrece is the proxy for and embodiment of the hated 'symbolic'. Seeing Lucrece as a monument of Rome, he chillingly declares, 'For in thy bed I purpose to destroy thee' (514). He will commission the revision of her 'symbolic' meaning, making her resistance 'the author of their [Rome] obloquy' (523). Lucrece exists as a linguistic article, her body a map; for the illiterate, her looks 'will quote [her] loathsome trespass.' Vickers suggests that 'rape is the price Lucrece pays for having been described' - that the description aroused Tarquin's desire. A Lacanian reading goes further, allowing us to argue that Lucrece was raped because of *what* she described.[50] As the narrative moves closer to the rape, Lucrece attempts one last appeal:

> 'Thou art,' quoth she, 'a sea, a sovereign king;
> And, lo, there falls into thy boundless flood
> Black lust, dishonour, shame, misgoverning,
> Who seek to stain the ocean of thy blood.
>
> (652-5)

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[50] Nancy Vickers, '"The blazon of sweet beauty's best": Shakespeare's Lucrece' in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985), pp. 95-115 (p. 102).

She develops the metaphor of his majesty as an ocean, swollen to a boundless flood into which all elements of honour will drown. Her description alludes to the biblical flood, in which God promises to 'destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die.' [51] The parallel casts Tarquin as a vengeful God of annihilation, a mirror, offered by Lucrece, to Tarquin's grotesque 'imaginary order'. But her appeal to his sense of power and responsibility, his Roman-*self,* even within a Christian metaphor, serves as a reminder of the 'symbolic order' from which he longs for release. When he finally says, 'No more […] by heaven I will not hear thee' (667) there is a sense that the pressures of *Romanitas* have become an unbearable burden. Tarquin silences Lucrece and extinguishes the lamp. Her capacity to articulate and perpetuate the 'symbolic' is vocally muted, but through her silence, she powerfully and yet helplessly perpetuates the idea of Roman femininity. She 'Entombs her outcry in her lips sweet fold' (679). This re-presents the image of chastity that Shakespeare introduced earlier in the poem, 'Between whose hills her head entombed is' (390) with the erotic play on 'lips', that Joel Fineman calls a 'smirky collation'.[52] This suggests that her sex is the locus of her silencing. Language for Lucrece, the instrument of the 'symbolic order', has failed her. Carolyn D. Williams describes 'the heroine's disastrous relationship with language [she] cannot trust words, written or spoken, to do her justice.'[53]

At this point, Lucrece and Tarquin share an uncomfortable affinity; both are symbols and sacrifices of Rome, both descending towards *self*-destruction. Fineman argues that this relationship is structurally supported, 'Tarquin and Lucrece both speak the same language'.[54]

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[51] Genesis 6:17.

[52] Joel Fineman, 'Shakespeare's Will: The Temporality of Rape', *Representations*, 20 (1987), pp. 25–76 (p. 43).

[53] Carolyn D. Williams, '"Silence, like a Lucrece Knife": Shakespeare and the Meanings of Rape', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 23 (1993), pp. 93-110 (p. 109).

[54] Fineman, p. 43.

I would go even further in suggesting that they are composed and imagined within the same linguistic code. Fineman describes the interaction of their language in this passage as sharing 'the equivalent tonalities and diction, the shared motifs, the stichomythian back-and-forth rhythms, through which they conduct their formal argument, in *utramque partem*, pro and contra rape.'[55] But the silencing of Lucrece, the staining of her bed, is both figurative and literal; her 'piteous clamours' are penned within her head by the 'nightly linen that she wears' (680-1). The 'jealous' pillow that once forebodingly entombed her head is now an accomplice of rape and symbolic death.

Lucrece has 'lost a dearer thing than life' (687), her reputation and 'symbolic' value. Tarquin's reckoning is more oxymoronic, 'he hath won what he would lose again' (688), and the thought continues when Tarquin is described as 'a captive victor that hath lost in gain' (730).[56] The influence of Ovid's 'Lucrece' is clear: Ovid's narrative voice admonishes Tarquin, 'why gloat, victor? This victory will destroy you.' (811)[57] The destruction which seems to allude to the considerations of Ovid's Tarquin are acknowledged and even pursued. These paradoxes speak of the fundamental contradiction of 'death desire'. Lacan addressed this in his 1953 paper 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis', delivered at the Rome Congress:

> The notion of the death instinct involves a basic irony, since its meaning has to be sought in the conjunction of two opposing terms: "instinct" which, in its broadest acceptation, is the law that regulates the successive stages of a behavioural cycle in order to accomplish a life function; and "death" which appears first of all as the destruction of life.[58]

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[55] Fineman, p. 43.

[56] Shakespeare, Duncan-Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen, p. 691.

[57] Publius Ovidius Naso, *Fasti*, trans. by Anne Wiseman and Timothy P. Wiseman, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 39.

[58] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English,* trans. by Bruce Fink, (New York: Norton, 2006), p. 260.; Lacan uses 'death drive' and 'death instinct' interchangeably.

The paradox of Lacan's death drive is analogous to the inherent paradox that we have observed in *cupio dissolvi*. We can read the desire for wholeness of Lacan's subjects, a lack that can only be addressed by death, as a cognate of the theme of *cupio dissolvi*.

The central trope of Tarquin's departure casts him as 'a thievish dog' (736), stealing into the night. He longs for daybreak, while Lucrece 'prays she never may behold the day' (746). Once again, Tarquin and Lucrece occupy two sides of a shared objective that leads them towards the same outcome. Lucrece desires death and, surely, with daybreak, Tarquin's crimes will be discovered and his infamy sealed. He has become 'a heavy convertite', Lucrece a 'hopeless castaway' (743-4), both imagined within the context of Christianity. Shakespeare uses 'convertite' in *King John* (1598) and *As You Like It* (1599) to describe the reformation of ungodly behaviour and here in The *Rape of Lucrece*, the word evokes a sense of Tarquin's guilt and penitence. Through Shakespeare's repeated use of Christian language and imagery, Lucrece emerges as a Christian martyr.

IV.   'A face where all distress is stelled'

Lucrece directs her grief and anger towards the 'comfort-killing Night' (765), and to the personified figures of Opportunity and Time, whom she identifies as Tarquin's enablers. She imagines her infamy, 'The nurse to still her child will tell my story […] Feast-finding minstrels, tuning my defame' (813-817). In doing so, she is not only delineating herself within the 'imaginary order' but also engaging in self-fashioning within the symbolic realm. Lucrece constructs her identity through language, shaping herself as a symbol of lost reputation. This act of self-fashioning reflects both a submission to and a resistance against the symbolic order, as she redefines her role within it while acknowledging the cultural forces that shape her identity.

Shakespeare's repeated use of anaphora presents the reader with a highly stylised rhetoric that dislocates Lucrece from the trauma of the incident itself. It looks outward, to a greater conspiracy. Three consecutive stanzas begin the first six lines with the word 'to' and reveal the subsequent verb more forcefully:

> To fill with worm-holes stately monuments,
> To feed oblivion with decay of things,
> To blot old books and alter their contents,
> To pluck the quills from ancient ravens' wings,
> To dry the old oak's sap and cherish springs,
> To spoil antiquities of hammer'd steel,
> And turn the giddy round of Fortune's wheel.
>
> (946-52)

The device serves two functions: first, it reinforces Lucrece as part of the 'symbolic order'; her assault and grief exist and are articulated through this linguistic code. The rhetoric, at least in its prolixity, resembles Marcus' description of the raped and mutilated Lavinia, about which Albert Tricomi asserts, Marcus' 'poetic description' contrasts the 'vacuous rhetoric of rape, and the palpable reality of Lavinia's ravishment'.[59] The contrast between Lavinia and Lucrece is that Shakespeare allows Lucrece to articulate her own trauma, rather than having a man speak for her. Its structure conveys a sense of authority and self-control. She attacks the abstract elements of Time and Opportunity, mocking their servitude to Tarquin, casting them as 'ugly' and 'false slave[s]' (925-7). All elements, people, events and abstract elements are turning into language; the figures of Time, Night and Opportunity failed to behave honourably, within the laws and customs of *Romanitas*. In this, Tarquin is not absolved but rather fully subsumed by the 'symbolic'.

These passages are intentionally rhetorical, as if the 'symbolic order' is reclaiming an act of the 'real'. This allows Lucrece to work out and up to the point of defiant action. She

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[59] Albert H. Tricomi, 'The Aesthetics of Mutilation in "Titus Andronicus"', in *Shakespeare Survey*, 27 (1974), pp. 11–20 (p. 13).

asks of Opportunity, 'When wilt thou sort an hour great strifes to end, / Or free that soul which wretchedness hath chained?' (899-900) This is not an articulation of her desire to die, for she has already suffered a death of sorts, but a desire to be self-determining and free. Her thoughts move between personal grief and something distinctly political: 'The orphan pines while the oppressor feeds; / Justice is feasting while the widow weeps' (905-6). Her injustice is binding to a broader sense of social injustice, an emerging image of Lucrece as a symbol not of Roman chastity but suffering. Opportunity, 'Misshapen Time […] ugly Night' are substitutes for a malevolent and deviant version of Rome, and in Lucrece's strengthening view are guilty of 'perjury […] subordination […] treason, forgery and shift […] incest'. Indeed, opportunity and time are guilty of 'all sins past and all that are to come, / From the creation to the general doom.' (919-24). Lucrece's hyperbole encompasses everything that belongs to the Roman order, including abstract structures. There are echoes here of both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Timon of Athens*: the former in Lucrece's contempt for Time and by it the suggestion that she desires the timelessness of an immutable eternity; the latter in the apocalyptic scale of her imprecation.

I have argued that the rape of Lucrece is, for Tarquin, a pursuit of *death drive*, and he is aware of the calamitous, deathly consequences of his actions but pursues them anyway. As symbols of *Romanitas*, his desire to 'destroy' Lucrece and himself are attacks on the linguistic code: Lucrece is figured as an item of language; signifying femininity, chastity, and honour. Tarquin threatens to 'tear' her as the page of a manuscript. Lucrece accuses Time of dereliction, but on closer scrutiny, perhaps Time has fulfilled its role. Lucrece, and by extension the 'symbolic order', is the worm-holed monument, the oblivion fed with decay and the old book blotted, contents altered, but her rape will not remain as her final iteration.

Lucrece's image has been developed, by the metaphors that figured her as a mute effigy, a thing to be conquered, a chastity to be boasted of. However, Shakespeare's

description of a hanging painting, depicting the fall of Troy, provides Lucrece with a means to develop her 'imaginary' self, a type of mirror. Richard Meek describes this passage, some 200 lines, as 'perhaps the most explicit and unequivocal example of a Shakespearean *ekphrasis*'.[60] Shakespeare describes the scene over 11 stanzas before returning the reader to Lucrece, as she searches for subjects within the painting that reflect her trauma:

> To this well-painted piece is Lucrece come,
> To find a face where all distress is stelled.
> Many she sees where cares have carved some,
> But none where all distress and dolour dwelled,
> Till she despairing Hecuba beheld,
> Staring on Priam's wounds with her old eyes,
> Which bleeding under Pyrrhus' proud foot lies.
>
> (1443-1449)

In Lacan's theory of the 'imaginary order,' the mirror stage introduces the idea of exteriority, shaping the conception of self, which Lacan refers to as the 'I'. In this stage, the individual perceives themselves not as a fragmented 'body of pieces,' but as a cohesive gestalt.[61] However, this sense of self is inherently illusory and elusive—an 'imaginary' construct that is subject to constant redefinition. Judith Butler expands on this by stating that, 'The ego is formed around the specular image of the body itself, but this specular image is itself an anticipation, a subjunctive delineation.'[62] This suggests that the self is not fixed but is continuously edited and re-edited, shaped by the tension between the anticipated image and the lived reality.

Lucrece's identity has been constructed, or at least informed, by the reflection of her image in reports, reputation, and now the painting. Butler's understanding of the image as an anticipation speaks of the instability of the ego and how the image is an object of alterity

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[60] Richard Meek, *Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare*, 1st edn (London: Routledge, 2017), p. 389.
[61] 'gestalt, *n.*' *OED Online*, A 'shape', 'configuration', or 'structure' which as an object of perception forms a specific whole or unity incapable of expression simply in terms of its parts.
[62] Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, Routledge Classics (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 75.

throughout a continuous negotiation of *self*-editing. The painting operates mimetically and shows Lucrece a mirror in Helen of Troy. Shakespeare describes Helen's abduction rather deliberately as a 'rape' (1369), and by mirroring Lucrece and Helen's traumas, the reader and Lucrece are directed towards anticipating the same disastrous outcome for Rome as is depicted in the painting of Troy, which is 'so cataclysmic that the stars are disturbed 'from their fixed places'(359). Helen's rape, like Lucrece's, has the power to destroy and re-create.

The description of the painting presents an ambivalence towards Helen, acknowledging her rape but undermining her integrity by casting her as another Trojan horse or enticing 'mermaid' (1411), a word loaded with licentiousness and deception. Shakespeare presents a house of mirrors 'to mock the mind' (1414). The boundary between Rome and Troy is blurred, as it is between truth and artifice. Characters are presented as symbols; Achilles is reduced to a single spear, others to 'angry swords' (1421) and 'gaping faces' (1408), 'A hand, a foot, a face, a leg, a head' (1427). Indeed, these fragmented parts only merge through Lucrece, who experiences them as *gestalt*. Lucrece can transcend her fragmented perception, drawing from the 'imaginary work' (1422) a wholeness of both her and her situation.

The depiction of Troy's destruction blends with the sexual and martial assault, an inversion of the metaphor used to describe Tarquin's rape of Lucrece. Lucrece searches for herself, 'a face where all distress is stelled' (1444), and finds Hecuba. Perhaps Lucrece now regards Hecuba as a mirror image, or the two women represent, like Achilles' spear, a symbol of the grief shared by womankind. In depicting Hecuba's sorrow, Shakespeare's painter has 'anatomized / Time's ruin, beauty's wrack and grim care's reign' (1450-1). In one reading of this, Hecuba, like Lucrece, has become a monument of grief, vulnerable to the weathering of time. Lacan allows us to go beyond this, to consider Time as an instrument of the 'symbolic order', irreparably harmed by an attack on its symbols of femininity. Hecuba appears as a

'body dead' (1456), having lost all trace of her majesty, '[o]f what she was no semblance did remain' (1453). She is the figure of voiceless grief. It is perhaps at this point in the poem, through a *gestalt* confrontation with herself and a bleak future, that Lucrece determines to intervene in the creation and perpetuation of her symbolic meaning. She declares:

> Poor instrument…without a sound,
> I'll tune thy woes with my lamenting tongue
> And drop sweet balm in Priam's painted wound,
> And rail on Pyrrhus that hath done him wrong,
> And with my tears quench Troy that burns so long,
> And with my knife scratch out the angry eyes
> Of all the Greeks that are thine enemies.
>
> (1464-70)

She decides to give a voice to Hecuba and with her tears, a symbol of her soul, to extinguish the fire of Troy. The voice she gives is of the patriarchal 'symbolic order' but now directed and shaped by Lucrece. Her Roman credentials do not negate her agency; she has always been a figure of the 'symbolic' and is now emerging as its author. Helen is branded a 'strumpet' (1471) while Paris is spared a label; his eyes are burdened for their trespass. This supports the trope of women's bodies as castles and palaces, occupied and controlled. She goes on to reflect the preference of *Romanitas* towards public over private good, 'Why should the private pleasure of someone / Become the public plague of many more?' (1479). Indeed, this principle is at the heart of the poem and *Romanitas*. L 'private and public spheres, private reading and public declaration, the enclosed and the *dis*closed, domestic space and the social arena…inherent and circulated value.'[63] Paris, with his eyes, entered a private space. The case is different with Lucrece, whose 'value' was circulated, disclosed, and declared by Collatine, spilling beyond the private sphere. Her question regarding private pleasure could be just as meaningfully directed to her husband, who mirrors the 'strumpet'

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[63] Breitenberg, p. 97.

Hero. The implication, perhaps realisation, is that Lucrece, unlike Hero, adhered to *Romanitas*. This thought seems to further develop a sense of purpose in Lucrece as she takes on the role of Stoic hero, allowing her response to the grief of her assault to be read as a Senecan trope. As Geoffrey Miles asserts, 'the gods take pleasure in the 'spectacle' of human virtue in combat with fortune […] if the gods allow good men [and women] to suffer, it is because virtue, to be virtue, must be seen in action.'[64] Through the mirror of the painting, Lucrece enacts the process of the Lacanian mirror-stage, outlined by Kelly McGuire, who posits that the image alienates the individual from *being* and paves the way for a second alienation 'the sacrifice of being for meaning within the symbolic.'[65]

Lucrece's honour, chastity and symbolic value, which were threatened by Tarquin's rape, are restored by the *gestalt* offered through the painting. She can read herself as Roman against the grief and hopelessness of others. Returning once again to Hunter's definition of *Romanitas,* Lucrece is *more* 'soldierly, severe, self-controlled, [and] self-disciplined' than Tarquin and Collatine.[66] She will not become a symbol of grief like the 'body dead', but will restore, indeed enhance, and re-write her symbolic value in the definitive act of Roman stoicism, suicide.

V.   'a harmful knife, that thence her soul unsheathed.'

Collatine returns and Lucrece is 'clad in mourning black' (1585), grieving the death of her 'symbolic' self and developing the notion of the two-fold crime, rape as a version of murder.

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[64] Geoffrey Miles, *Shakespeare and the Constant Romans*, Oxford English Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 51.
[65] *Lacanian Interpretations of Shakespeare*, ed. by Douglas A. Brooks and Shirley Sharon-Zisser, A Publication of the Shakespeare Yearbook, 5.19 (Lewiston, N.Y: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010), p. 413.
[66] G. K. Hunter "A Roman Thought: Renaissance Attitudes to History Exemplified in Shakespeare and Jonson," in, An *English Miscellany: Presented to W. S. Mackie*, ed. by Brian S. Lee and William Soutar Mackie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 94.

Lucrece is lifted from the Augustinian suspicions and those echoes of blame and judgement that dominated scholarly perception of *The Rape of Lucrece* until the 1970s. Given this symbolic death, she cannot have killed herself if her 'self' was already dead . She is imagined as a corpse, a 'bloodless hand' (1597), her 'fair colour spent' (1600).

In the stanzas that follow, language and life are bound together in their struggle. Lucrece kindles her 'sorrow['s] fire' (1604) to emit the spark of a word, but acknowledges that:

> 'Few words', quoth she, 'shall fit the trespass best,
> Where no excuse can give the fault amending.
> In me moe woes than words are now depending,
> And my laments would be drawn out too long
> To tell them all with one poor tired tongue.
>
> (1613-17)

We see that Lucrece's body, soul and language are firmly entwined. The soul is left 'troubled' (1176), the body 'spotted, soiled and corrupted' (1172) and her tongue, the instrument of language, is 'tired' (1617). She provides a brief allusion to the rape for her husband and 'consorted lords' (1609) but directs them towards their imaginations to provide a fuller account. There are several reasons why Lucrece avoids explicit reference to the rape: first, to avoid the trauma of re-living the experience through its description; second, supported by Garthine Walker's account of early modern sexual assaults, pathos and sympathy would have been better engendered through a demure avoidance of an explicit sexual account; and, finally, that the experience of rape is ineffable, existing beyond the 'symbolic order' as an act that cannot be fully understood through words. [67]

Lucrece describes how Tarquin threatened to sexually implicate her with a servant and murder them both, a threat that was reinforced with his sword pressed against her heart.

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[67] Garthine Walker, 'Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early Modern England', *Gender & History*, 10.1 (1998), 1–25.

Tarquin's threat is that if Lucrece fails to take all 'patiently' she 'should not live to speak another word' (1641-2), the focus often returning to language. Tarquin assumes that death for Lucrece would mean speechlessness but, through her suicide, Lucrece continues to communicate her strength and symbolic value. After the rape, Lucrece is in a liminal, purgatorial space, cast as a revenge tragedian, like Hamlet's father and Hamlet himself, the sleeping victim of a serpent's assault. She can speak and walk the earth but with the singular purpose of inciting the living to revenge. She conjures two versions of herself, the former departed wife of Collatine and now the messenger of Justice. She commands 'For she that was thy Lucrece, now attend me' (1682) and prepares to 'name' (1688) the aggressor, the first part of the process of returning the chaos of the 'real' to the 'symbolic'.

Lucrece's insistence that Collatine and his companions must swear an oath to enact her revenge suggests that she no longer relies on the unsupported or casual words of others. The argument is supported by Williams' assertion that Lucrece has a 'disastrous relationship with language'.[68] She is cast into purgatory but provided with a fleeting return to earth to set things right. Language binds the living to the dead, it straddles time, drawing on notions of ancient knighthood, honour, and reputation. The oath places Collatine and his companions in an imagined court with Lucrece as the accuser *and* accused but also as the director of the scene. She speaks of justice, offence, and acquittal, questioning and inviting them to speak. This is a notable deviation from Shakespeare's primary sources: Livy, having Collatinus, Lucretius, and Valerius make their oath to Brutus.[69] And Ovid's Lucrece stabs herself without seeking oaths at all.[70] It is perhaps at this point that we recognise the immanence of

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[68] Williams, p. 109.

[69] Titus Livius, *History of Rome*, ed. by Jeffrey Henderson, trans. by B. O. Foster (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1919), Volume I: Book 1.

[70] Publius Ovidius Naso, *Fasti*, Ed. By Jeffrey Henderson, Trans. by James George Frazer (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1931), Book II.

her suicide as she turns away 'with a joyless smile' (1711). She understands Collatine's

revenge will yield modest results without the symbolic reordering that will follow her suicide.

VI.   The Emblem of Lucrece: 'better to die than to live shamefully'

Figure 11. *Lucretia* (c.1511-12) by Marcantonio Raimondi (C. 1480-1534) after a sketch by Raphael (d. 1520).

Marcantonio Raimondi's emblem of Lucrece provides a bridge between the taxonomy of

cupio dissolvi in the first chapter of this thesis and my Lacanian reading of Lucrece's rape

and suicide. Marcantonio produced the image of Lucrece on the edge of suicide in 1511. The

image was a close copy of Raphael's 1508-10 sketch of Lucrece. Marcantonio adds a garden

to the background, Corinthian pillars and, crucially, a tablet inscribed in Ancient Greek:

'better to die than to live shamefully'. It is the inclusion of this motto, which might be

regarded as an *inscriptio*, that allows us to understand the image as an emblem, employing

the 'considerable latitude' that Henry Green suggests is 'taken and allowed' in the attribution

of emblems, but the image is striking in the simplicity of its message. Despite a well-

documented awareness of Raimondi's work among early modern playwrights, I will follow

Stuart Gillespie's caution that attempting 'to discover instances of Shakespeare working from particular emblems is dogged with uncertainty'.[71] The Marcantonio emblem does, however, reinforce the profitability of understanding Shakespeare's poem in emblematic terms.

Jeffrey Paxton Hehmeyer posits that Shakespeare makes 'pervasive use of the commonplace throughout the poem' but perhaps, leading from Shakespeare's engagement with ekphrasis and the weight of visual imagery throughout the poem, we might better understand these commonplaces as emblems.[72] Michael Bath suggests that there is evidence that 'emblem books themselves […] were recognised, among other things, as collections of illustrated commonplaces.'[73] Charles Moseley's essay on emblems argues that:

> with Shakespeare and his fellows working in a culture where the emblem was a common way of expressing complex ideas, it would be odd if we did not find its peculiar compressed and oblique discourse affecting the writing and experience of plays.[74]

Moseley's essay also provides a useful definition of an emblem as 'a miniature artistic form that combines words and pictures in a complex, interdependent, and often ambiguous way.' Testing the Marcantonio image against this definition, we can see that it neatly qualifies, and we might also read Shakespeare's Lucrece, especially the moment of her suicide, as emblematic. Indeed, words and images are more interdependent in Shakespeare's poem, as words are used to create the image. Moseley posits that 'emblems self-consciously and self-referentially exploited poetry and picture to make a *tertium quid'*, a third state that seems to emerge through Shakespeare's ekphrasis. This reading of Lucrece provokes a series of questions: if Shakespeare's Lucrece is an emblem, what type of emblem is she? What aspects

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[71] Stuart Gillespie, *Shakespeare's Books: A Dictionary of Shakespeare Sources*, Second edition (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016), p. 150.

[72] Jeffrey Paxton Hehmeyer, 'Heralding the Commonplace: Authorship, Voice, and the Commonplace in Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece*', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 64.2 (2013), 139–64.

[73] Michael Bath, *Speaking Pictures: English Emblem Books and Renaissance Culture*, Longman Medieval and Renaissance Library (London: Longman, 1994), p. 357.

[74] Charles Moseley, 'Emblems', in *The Cambridge Guide to the Worlds of Shakespeare*, ed. by Bruce R. Smith and others, 1st edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 407–17 (p. 407).

of the emblem's message, and the relationship between words and images, are complex, interdependent and ambiguous? Moseley is instructive, again, at least in our attempts to answer the first question. He defines a type of emblem that is revealed through Shakespeare's Lucrece:

> the class of representations most easily recognised today: allegorical personifications of abstract concepts, some already isolated and formulated in late antiquity and in the Middle Ages. These include concepts such as fortune, occasion, prudence, time, truth, the sins, the virtues, or the humors. [75]

Using Marcantonio's Lucrecia emblem as a proto-Lucrece, we see that through her suicide she embodies a knot of virtues that are best understood as *Romanitas* 'soldierly, severe, self-controlled, self-disciplined'.[76] For Shakespeare, to fall on one's sword was the Roman way, a death which he bestowed on Horatio, who enjoined his suicidal image with the equivalent of a spoken *inscriptio*, 'I am more an antique Roman than a Dane' (*Hamlet*. 5.2.294)*.* In the adoption of the characteristics of *Romanitas,* Marcantonio's image of Lucretia, and that of Shakespeare's literary image of Lucrece, challenge this version of masculine virtue. Raphael's original sketch of Lucretia is made livelier in Marcantonio's etching through the Botticellian wave of her hair and her closed eyes. These revisions are not merely aesthetic: the movement of Lucretia's hair is the visual articulation of high emotions; Lucretia's closed eyes reveal her as unable to look at the harm she is about to do to herself, but also as an image of sleep and death, amplifying and fetishising her vulnerability. We see the same collision of *Romanitas* and femininity in Shakespeare's depiction of Lucrece. She is composed of sighs, untimely breathings, and a breaking heart. Her speech is limited, it

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[75] Charles Moseley, *A Century of Emblems* (London: Scholar Press, 1989), p. 14.
[76] G. K. Hunter "A Roman Thought: Renaissance Attitudes to History Exemplified in Shakespeare and Jonson," in An *English Miscellany: Presented to W. S. Mackie*, ed. by Brian S. Lee and William Soutar Mackie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 94.

'accents and delays' (1719) and Shakespeare returns her body to the siege metaphors, only this time it is Lucrece that 'assays' her own body, attempting to penetrate her flesh.

While sharing many attributes with Pudicitia, the Roman goddess of sexual modesty and virtue, Lucrece, through her suicide, manages to seize elements of *Romanitas* that give her agency and authorship far beyond meekness and obedience to patriarchy. What she does manage to say is revealing. Tarquin is reduced to 'He', a pronoun which perhaps places his rape of Lucrece within the broader patriarchal context. Tarquin symbolises both the patriarchal order of Rome and its perversion and ruin. Lucrece declares that ''tis he/That guides this hand to give this wound to me' (1721-2). Collatine and his companions are thus witness to a reenacted version of the rape, whereby Lucrece is phallically penetrated.

Shakespeare develops the margin between body and soul, imagining Lucrece's body as a vessel and her soul bailing out like water from a sinking ship. Her soul, her winged sprite, is conveyed to the heavens on her sighs; sighs that tried to move Tarquin from his assault, that gave 'her sorrow fire' (1604) and delivered the name of her attacker. If she is to become an emblem, her meaning is more complex and powerful than Marcantonio's *inscriptio* 'better to die than to live shamefully.' Lucrece's death is not in the cause of a Roman patriarchal imperative, but an act of agency, authorship, and freedom, owing more to the early modern Christian milieu than to notions of Rome. Lucrece's dead body immediately becomes an article of language. As her wound bleeds out, she is perhaps naked, prostrate and encircled in blood. [77] The image offers a version of re-birth, whereby Lucrece stages, in reverse order, the actions of creation and destruction. She plays all the parts. She penetrates herself; she becomes the foetus in the womb; and then the baby, covered in blood. The literal and figurative move in opposite directions. Through her agency, Lucrece has concluded the

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[77] Duncan-Jones glosses Shakespeare's use of 'Bare' (1741) 'Cam^2 detects a reference to Lucrece's partial nakedness at the moment of her death'. Shakespeare, Duncan-Jones, and others, p. 374.

death that Tarquin began, and by it she has delivered her resurrection. The rape has been re-enacted for and *on* Lucretius and Collatine, both of whom compete over the scale of their loss.

Lucretius calls out 'Daughter, dear daughter' (1751), attempting to fix a notion of who she is and how that informs his understanding of *self*. He speaks in Lacanian terms about his image lying in her, and now they are both 'Poor broken glass' (1758). He protests 'I no more can see what once I was' (1764). It appears that Lucretius is following a similar pattern of sorrow to his daughter. He scolds Time, demanding that it should 'cease' its 'course and last no longer' (1765). The resulting chaos of Tarquin's assault on Lucrece has been translated and, to some extent, transposed onto Lucretius. Collatine shares in this transposition of grief, echoing Lucrece's inarticulateness. He returns from 'a dream' (1772), the shared limen of Lucrece's suspended state. He falls to the ground and bathes in Lucrece's blood, attempting to 'counterfeit' (1776) her death - what Duncan-Jones calls 'play-acting'. [78] This performance contributes to the poem's disruption or destabilisation of gender which may be traced in Shakespeare's Classical sources. Ovid regards Lucretia as 'a matron of manly spirit' (2.847).[79]

As I have suggested, the mode of Lucrece's death has forced the experience upon Collatine, who now revels in the image of Lucrece, as Lucrece did in Hecuba. Eventually, 'manly shame bids him possess his breath' (1777). Like Lucrece's sighs, that express a multitude, Collatine's breath seems to convey and thus reveal his unmanly emotions. Language abandons him, making his 'Weak words, so thick […] That no man could distinguish what he said' (1784-85). Both Collatine and Lucretius are struck with weeping, which provides an expression for their grief when language fails them. The stanza that

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[78] Shakespeare, Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen, *Shakespeare's Poems,* p. 377.
[79] Publius Ovidius Naso, *Fasti*, trans. by Anne Wiseman and Timothy P. Wiseman, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 39.

follows sees the men compete over possession of Lucrece and the greater claim they might have on their grief.

We return to Tarquin's possession of Lucrece and Mark Breitenberg's assertion that 'love and desire effeminize inasmuch as they overthrow masculine reason.'[80] This unseemly tug-of-war over the corpse of Lucrece is the continuation of the war of possession between men, where, as Vickers asserts, Lucrece's body 'constitutes the field upon which the battle may be fought.[81] What is often missed in the possession debate, however, is Shakespeare's simple answer: that 'neither may possess the claim they lay' (1794). Lucrece's re-writing of the 'symbolic order' allows her to transcend the labels of 'daughter' or 'wife'. She is, rather, a more complex symbol of female agency, a symbol of Stoic *Romanitas*, resistance, and Christian martyrdom. She does not yearn to dissolve and be with Christ, which would be incongruous with the syncretism that Shakespeare has constructed, but she does seek her death as an act of agency, and it is the clarity and courage of that death that allows her to enter the symbolic world of the play as something new and powerful.

Brutus uses this tragic scene to stage a political maturation. He elevates himself from 'silly jeering idiot' to counsellor (1812). The trauma of Rome and Lucrece blur, both 'suffer these abominations' (1832). The final moments of the poem are striking in their return to language. Invocations, vows, and protestations translate the tragic events into a contract for revenge and renewal. To these words, Lucrece's body is added. They plan to parade her through the streets of Rome and so 'publish' on her 'Tarquin's foul offence' (1852). Lucrece is paraded in triumph through Rome, as the spoils of the war against Tarquin and perhaps as the fallen Roman warrior – stained purple by her blood.

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[80] Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, 1st edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 99.

[81] Nancy J. Vickers, "This Heraldry in Lucrece' Face", *Poetics Today*, 6.1/2 (1985), pp. 171-184 (p. 181).

VII.   The Book of Lucrece

Before Lucrece is seen and heard, she is invoked through words. She is depicted as beautiful, and her chastity through her husband's report to the assembled lords of Rome (11). She is a symbol of obedience, performing 'particular duties' for her husband (14). She is imagined celestially, her eyes as mortal stars; as a gift, lent by the heavens and as delicate, vulnerable and ephemeral as 'the morning silver melting dew' (24). From the outset, Lucrece is an article of the language of Rome and its 'symbolic order'. She is 'published' by Collatine as a precious object, likening her to a 'rich jewel' (34) which strips her of agency and reduces her identity to a mere symbol. For Tarquin and the other lords, including Collatine, Lucrece's symbolic value reflects and reinforces their own identities within a complex hierarchical structure, revealing how their sense of honour and status is intricately tied to the image she represents. They are the symbols of masculine *Romanitas*, made more or less masculine by their contrast against Lucrece. Shakespeare suggests Tarquin's 'envy' (39), and for many his motivation to rape Lucrece is a combination of lust and entitlement. For Peter Smith, Tarquin is sacrificed to fulfil and perpetuate the imperatives of patriarchy; his banishment 'reinforces the masculinity of political authority even while it transmogrifies its institutions for the better'.[82] Notwithstanding the discomfort of acknowledging Tarquin as another victim of Lucrece's rape, a notion that finds rather less nuanced support from Hynes and Cameron-Allen, there is truth in Shakespeare's joining of Lucrece and Tarquin through shared language. This notion, as we have seen, is expertly developed by Joel Fineman.

Smith's suggestion that Tarquin's banishment, a consequence of the rape of Lucrece, brings about fundamental and improved political change seems to allow Tarquin too much credit, albeit unintended. It also requires an acceptance of cause and effect that begins with

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[82] Peter Smith, *Rome's Disgrace*, p. 418.

rape which leads to suicide, banishment and political renewal. What other outcomes may have prevailed? She may have borne her shame and infamy, perhaps exiled in place of Tarquin with his tyranny continuing, unchecked. This line of possibility demonstrates that the transformative act is Lucrece's self-destruction not the destruction of *self*, brought about by Tarquin. Through her suicide, she edits the damage of the rape, elevating the event and herself from the chaos of the 'real' to the order of the 'symbolic'.

Tarquin acts on behalf of patriarchy, as Brown-Miller's 'masculine shock-troops', or as another victim of that patriarchy, a young man cultured to associate masculinity with possession, exposing a central conflict of the Roman 'symbolic order': a culture of martial invasion set against the maintenance of self-discipline and self-control.[83] Tarquin's lust blinds him to the differences between material and sexual possession, whilst others see Tarquin's rape of Lucrece as evidence of an ambiguous boundary between the two. These perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Tarquin himself is tormented by this conflict, a sense that Lucrece is his to possess and, simultaneously, that such a possession is counter to the values and expectations of *Romanitas*. This reading builds on Fineman's drawing together of Lucrece and Tarquin, and Smith's notion of Tarquin as another victim of a toxic masculine culture but sees Tarquin's actions as being aware of the consequences and running headlong towards them. His banishment is a transmogrification of the political institutions of Rome, but any implied credit directed towards Tarquin, or indeed the nobles that forced his removal, as the instigators of this transformation, misses the point and does Lucrece a disservice. It is a pattern of analysis that traces back to Seneca, who asserts, 'To Brutus we owe our freedom, but to Lucretia we owe Brutus', casting Lucrece as the intermediary between Tarquin's destructive impulses and Brutus' delivery of Roman freedom.[84]

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[83] Brownmiller, *Against Our Will,* p. 209.
[84] Seneca, *Dialogues and Essays*, trans. by John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 68.

The nature of the crime and the suicidal intervention of Lucrece is what renews a specific sense of *Romanitas*; of a priority towards the community of Rome, which was obscured by a promotion of selfhood. Tarquin's motivation is wholly destructive and would have remained so but for Lucrece's suicide, which edited the blot of Tarquin's assault.

Seen from a Lacanian perspective, and returning to a self-referential metaphor, Tarquin seeks to 'blot' the book, Lucrece reauthors herself and Rome, and Brutus merely seizes the opportunity to read Lucrece's iteration and 'publish' it to the city. Shakespeare's self-referential focus on literary metaphors, present in the poem's source material, developed to include a sustained emphasis on the value and perpetuity of recorded words in books and the craft of editing through an abundant use of words like 'blot' (948). He builds on an understanding of the Roman *exempla*, narratives of individuals who became representative of the vices and virtues of their exploits, as 'incarnations of specific qualities'.[85] In so doing, she publishes Tarquin's treachery against the community of Rome. Her warning that 'princes are the glass, the school, the book, / Where subjects' eyes do learn, do read, do look' (615-16) reveals the active nature of her editing role.

Lucrece never really desires death, not in the way of *cupio dissolvi*. Immediately following her rape, she becomes an ambiguous symbol of victimhood and suffering. For a short time after, as her thoughts are shaped by the wall-hung image of Helen at the fall of Troy, this symbolism is private and intimate; she is unpublished. But by the time she reveals the incident and its perpetrator, she is armed with a dagger and ready to die. She dissolves, by her own agency, into the linguistic structures of Rome, and beyond. Like the Christian martyrs that desired death to be free from the mutability and wickedness of the flesh, Lucrece is transmuted by her self-determined death into words and symbols.

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[85] Jan H. Blits, 'Redeeming Lost Honor: Shakespeare's Rape of Lucrece', *The Review of Politics*, 71.3 (2009), 411–27 (p. 421).

CONCLUSION

This thesis has illuminated the presence of a theme of self-destructive renewal that operates within Shakespeare's plays and narrative poems. Through this lens, overlooked aspects of Shakespeare's texts and their relationship to the Christian milieu of early modern England are revealed. The notion is given shape by the Latin locution *cupio dissolvi*, a Pauline sentiment that seemed to acquire a particular usefulness to early modern thinkers who sought to express a distaste and distrust of the temporal world and a deep longing to enter a divine eternity. Where the phrase was used, by whom and to what degree of explicitness were important aspects in providing an organising principle for the analysis of Shakespeare's plays and poems. Some uses of *cupio dissolvi* articulated a mystical longing for the divine, a theme that was applied to the analysis of *Romeo and Juliet's Via Mystica;* in other areas, such as Nicholas Breton's poem 'The Longing of a Blessed Heart', the phrase's inherent association with *contemptus mundi* illuminate the presence of the theme in *Timon of Athens* and *Hamlet.*[1] *Cupio dissolvi* functioned like one of Ita Mac Cathy's *Renaissance Keywords*, revealing a culture through its use. *Cupio dissolvi* is particularly rewarding as an analytical tool in three ways: first, for the inherent paradox of desiring to die and how this transforms tragedies into triumphs; second, its articulation of a defiant notion that transcends and diminishes temporal authority; and third, in its attempt to articulate a desire for something ineffable and how this trait lends itself to philosophical frameworks that replace God with an unobtainable desire.

  The structure of the thesis establishes the early modern salience of *cupio dissolvi* and provides a detailed survey of its varied use. This creates a theoretical framework that supports

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[1] Nicholas Breton, 'An Excellent Poeme, upon the longing of a blessed heart: which loathing the world, doth long to be with Christ. With an Addition upon the definition of love by' (London: R. Bradock, 1601).

the deeper analysis of three plays and a poem. Two parts emerge: the first explores *Hamlet*

and *Timon of Athens,* both cynical outsiders who seek the destruction of the state, and with it

themselves, to outside powers; the second, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Rape of Lucrece,* where

a willingness to die gives Juliet and Lucrece an opportunity to direct their narrative and

dissolve into an immutable eternity.

Hamlet offers the most explicit example of the *cupio dissolvi* theme in Shakespeare's

plays. For Shakespeare scholarship, *cupio dissolvi* helps to expose Hamlet's struggle with

faith and philosophy, caught between two versions of humanity: the Picoean masterpiece and

a thing of clay. The first soliloquy, which begins 'O that this too too sallied flesh would melt'

(1.2.229), engages with the symbolism of *cupio dissolvi*, the melting flesh a close synonym of

dissolution, and Hamlet's apostrophe demonstrating the force of his desire. The metaphorical

language of this soliloquy seems to belong to an early modern fascination with the process of

corporeal dissolution, or as Mary Floyd Wilson puts it, a 'familiarity of this habit of

thought'.[2] Richard Crashaw uses it in his poem about St Teresa, 'And melt thy soul's sweet

mansion; / Like a soft lump of incense'.[3] It is not Hamlet's wish to dissolve to nothing but to

become dew and aspire to the heavens. The differences between the Q1 and the more similar

Q2 and F versions of this soliloquy further develop the latent notion of a resurrection in the

latter texts: Q1 presents Hamlet's nihilistic longing for his flesh to 'melt to nothing' (Q1,

2.55-6), an annihilating imprecation like Timon's in tone. Q2 and F, on the other hand,

engage with the *cupio dissolvi* process, which will lead to a spiritual renewal.

Hamlet's conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in the early part of Act

Two explores the interplay of his self-destructive thoughts and the scope and limitations of

thought. Human reason can reimagine the world, as Hamlet declares, 'there is nothing either

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[2] Mary Floyd Wilson and Garrett Sullivan, *Geographies of Embodiment in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 153.
[3] Richard Crashaw, 'A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Admirable Saint Teresa', in Grierson, pp. 159–63.

good or bad, but thinking makes it so' (F, 2.2.248-9), but reasoning is a process of the flesh and cannot, without action and faith, reach eternity. This debate is continued in Hamlet's next soliloquy, which begins, 'I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth' (F. 2.2.294). The value of the speech justifies the approach of using Q1, Q2 and F in parallel. It further reveals Hamlet's ambivalence towards humanity, starting in the model of Pico della Mirandola's 'Oration on the Dignity of Man', celebrating noble reason, infinite faculties and casting humanity as 'like an angel […] like a god' (F, 2.2.306-7). This initial praise turns to denigration, and we understand that Hamlet's mirroring of Mirandola may be satirical. Man is returned from the heavens and revealed as the 'quintessence of dust' (F, 2.2.308). This critique of humanism also reveals Hamlet's longing for the certainty and rituals of his father's court.

The 'To be, or not to be' (3.1.55) soliloquy distils Hamlet's exploration of dissolution and resurrection, his *cupio dissolvi* theme. It articulates the conflict and paradox between theological, philosophical and practical concerns: revenge, suicide or inaction. What emerges is a view that reasoning, the tip of humanism's hierarchy, is as corruptible as the flesh, often *by* the flesh. This is supported by Martin Luther's vitriol against reason, declaring it the 'Devil's greatest whore; by nature of being she is a noxious whore; she is a prostitute, the Devil's appointed whore'.[4] Luther's view on reason was more complex but what can be concluded is that Luther promoted the idea that reasoning should not exceed its mandate by attempting to explain the concerns of faith. Hamlet begins to separate temporal agency and divine providence. He doubts the ability of reason to guide his actions. He recognises that reason is prone to bias and corruption and has allowed him to justify inaction. The Gravedigger scene, Act Five, Scene One, is the final and conclusive illustration for Hamlet of

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[4] Luther, 'Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments' (1525). *Luther's Works*. Vol. 40. ed. by Conrad Bergendoff. (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), pp. 73-225.

the frailty of man. The scene, and specifically the object of Yorick's skull, function as a *memento mori,* but they also inspire Hamlet's readiness to die.

In its exploration of the theme of destructive renewal, *Timon of Athens* shares a view of human corruption and moral frailty with Hamlet's perspective on the Claudian court. Both Hamlet and, eventually, Timon exist as outsiders. But while Hamlet is burdened with contradictory philosophical and theological frameworks, Timon adopts an apocalyptic longing for the destruction of Athens. His ideas for the destruction of the city allude to biblical apocalypse narratives, especially the ruin of Sodom and Gomorrah. Timon is revealed as a holy scourge, seeking to turn humanity's wickedness on itself. Of the examples of *cupio dissolvi* that are explored in this thesis, Timon's offers the least scope for renewal. In the final moments of the play, however, Alcibiades gestures at peace and forgiveness.

The first two acts of *Timon of Athens* establish Timon's court as a pageant of artifice. This idea is developed by the archetypal characters and their focus on appearance. The style resembles an early modern 'shew' as described by M. C. Bradbrook based on the *Masque of Fame* (1609) by Ben Jonson, 'numbers or pageants […] costume is gorgeous and symbolic; speech in the form of set orations or brisk debate; one leading character may dominate.' [5]

This theatrical style lends itself well to the creation of a marketplace of flattery and self-interest. Timon occupies the archetype of a decadent spendthrift, buying his friendships with lavish gifts and money. Much of the scholarship that accompanies this play focuses on its economic aspects and considers Timon to be a rich man who loses his riches, and with them his friends' loyalty. But Timon's wealth is merely part of the illusion of the pageant, and so when his credit runs out, he does not lose anything that he has ever really owned. He is outcast and angry but awakened to the city's artificiality and wickedness. From the city walls, Timon mounts his first battering imprecation. It is a curse on the city that functions as

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[5] Bradbrook, p. 17.

a protest and a warning. The location of this scene is also important for two reasons: first, Timon's view of the licentious city below parallels Lot's view of Sodom and Gomorrah, a parallel that will continue to reveal important elements of Timon's apocalyptic desire; second, as Timon stands outside of the city, he occupies the first of several liminal spaces between the civilisation of Athens and the wilderness beyond. An expression of Timon's abandonment of the city is his disrobing. By removing the costume of the pageant city, he is abandoning its spectacle and is yielding himself to the wild. His nakedness, in the religious context of early modern England, is also associated with political and social subversion, echoing historical examples of using nakedness as a sign of protest.

Timon becomes a hermit, living in a cave and digging for roots in the earth. His subsistence further contributes to the politically disruptive figure he has become. His discovery of gold works alchemically, drawing out the dross of Athens to seek their fortunes, all of whom are returned to Athens with instructions to destroy the city from within. The thieves are urged to 'Rob one another […] cut throats […] break open shops' (4.3.440-2), the prostitutes are directed to infect the city with syphilis. Timon's destruction would resemble a hellscape of moral collapse. In the scenes that precede Timon's ambiguous death, he carefully prepares his epitaph and, with his final words, reveals the *cupio dissolvi* theme by declaring that 'graves only be men's work and death their gain' (5.2.107). Athens does not fall into ruin and Alcibiades' rule will likely change very little of the moral character of its citizens, but Timon has seen the wickedness of humanity, its greed and idolatry and he has fled from it.

Romeo and Juliet's destructive desire, unlike Timon's, is directed inwards, towards self-destruction and a shared renewal. Romeo and Juliet's pathway draws on the mystical element of *cupio dissolvi*. They engage with a series of self-abnegating moments, each bringing them closer to union, before the perfect union of their shared deaths at the end of the

play. Through this Christian mystical lens, Romeo and Juliet are reimagined as pilgrims on a *via mystica,* led by Christian devotional practices, to achieve a transformative union that transcends worldly experience. Central to their desire for dissolution is the promise of a union that will be immutable and eternal. The analysis of this play explores the relationship between sacred and secular representations of love. It responds to Kenneth Graham's point on early modern Christian culture and the theatre:

> religious change brought new definitions of religion and new understandings of the relationship between the sacred and the secular. Did the theater bear witness to and seek to compensate for the withdrawal of the holy, as some have claimed? [6]

Whether *Romeo and Juliet* compensated for the 'withdrawal of the holy' is beyond the focus of this analysis. The play does, however, engage with and borrow from the symbols, language and cultural value of Christian devotional practice. The notion of seeking the divine and longing for its immanence is easily and very profitably translated to the secular stage.

It might be reasonably suggested that Romeo and Juliet did not seek death, indeed they wanted to live, and that their deaths are the play's tragedy. But Romeo and Juliet engaged with the pursuit of their union as zealots for which each self-abnegating act was never quite enough. They renounced their names and identity, they married and had sex, but because their romance followed the template of sacred devotion, to which the ultimate expression of faith is *cupio dissolvi*, they were impelled to embrace their mutual deaths.

In the early part of the play, Romeo is infatuated with Rosaline. He expresses his feelings in conquering terms and focuses on her beauty. She is a symbol of temporal mutability, destined to become a faded beauty. Romeo's idolatrous worship of Rosaline ends abruptly the moment that Romeo first sees Juliet and later, at Juliet's balcony, he declares that he will 'be new baptised. / Henceforth [he] never will be Romeo' (2.2.50-51). Romeo

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[6] *Shakespeare and Religious Change*, ed. by Kenneth Graham and Philip Collington (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 9.

will end his old life and start an entirely new one. It will be a symbolic dissolution and renewal that becomes legal and holy by their marriage. Their project of perfect spiritual union is signalled in Romeo's brief exchange with Friar Laurence. Romeo tells the Friar that he and Juliet are already 'all combined, save what thou must combine / By holy marriage.' (2.3.56-57) Sex is the next combining act, by which Romeo and Juliet suspend time in an aeviternal timelessness. Sex for Romeo and Juliet delivered them in a mystical sense to their closest union, but it was temporary. The final station on their mystical pilgrimage is actual death, which allows them to dissolve the barrier of the flesh and combine in an eternal, immutable spiritual union. The *cupio dissolvi* theme reveals their deaths as a triumph over the prohibitive temporal structures, both of the body and the body politic.

The analysis of *The Rape of Lucrece* uses the framework of Lacanian theory to explore Tarquin's self-destructive impulse and Lucrece's agency-giving suicide. It is a departure from the explicit Christian parallels of previous chapters, but there is a latent divinity in Lacan's philosophy which presents a desire, the *objet petit a,* for wholeness. It is a desire that echoes Christian mystical aspirations, including those of Romeo and Juliet. The final chapter is an attempt to reveal Tarquin's self-destructive impulse as an aggressive response to the symbolic order of Rome and to recast Lucrece's suicide as a powerful act of agency and self-authorship.

Lacan's register theory offers a useful perspective on the symbolic culture of Shakespeare's Rome. It helps to explain how Tarquin is both captive to those imperatives and their author. When Tarquin rapes Lucrece, he is assaulting her body, reputation and a foundational symbol of *Romanitas*. In this way, Lacan allows us to understand Tarquin's rape of Lucrece as an act of self-harm: a symbol of the state blotting and rewriting another symbol of the state. It is self-destructive in an obvious sense but also more profoundly by destroying part of the symbolic order by which his identity is shaped, and his power is projected.

Following the rape, Lucrece studies a painting of the fall of Troy. From the painting, particularly the depiction of Helen, she is able to see herself in narrative and symbolic terms, representing a similar victimhood to Helen. This is when Lucrece decides to become the author of her symbolic identity with an act that will be equal to the aggression and outrage of the rape.

Marcantoni's emblematic depiction of Lucrece (*Fig.10*), presents her as a determined martyr, not of Christian love but of *Romanitas*. This scene is quite unlike Juliet's suicide for an eternal, sacred-shaped love. Lucrece is asserting power and self-determination. She will use her suicide to publish her heroism and regain her agency. The *cupio dissolvi* theme has been stretched far from its Pauline origin, and each part of the phrase now seems to require translation, but it remains useful to understanding a deep desire to dissolve and renew. For Lucrece, her corporeality is constructed of language and symbols and so her dissolution is into that linguistic framework.

The principal aim of this thesis has been to explore and interrogate the presence of a theme of destructive renewal in Shakespeare. From an historicist approach, Christianity has provided the frame of analysis for the first four chapters, particularly the Latin locution *cupio dissolvi.* Both have helped to focus attention on identifying in Shakespeare's characters and narratives an often-unaccountable desire to destroy, and to further understand this instinct as a profoundly positive ambition. The process of destructive renewal is at the heart of Christian theology, from biblical apocalypse narratives to Christ's Passion. These narratives, and their symbols and language, inform and imbue Shakespeare's plays and poems. Understanding a Christian perspective of destructive renewal, encapsulated by the phrase *cupio dissolvi*, provides a renewed perspective on Shakespeare's work. It reframes *Romeo and Juliet* as a triumph of love, their deaths a dissolution and ascension to a sacred, eternal union. It helps us to see that *Timon of Athens* is not about the loss of riches but the awakening of a man to the

fallibility of the human condition and his hope for an annihilating renewal. *Cupio dissolvi* helps us to better understand Hamlet's *contemptus mundi,* his desire for his flesh to melt not as bitterness, petulance or nihilism, but as an expression of the priority of the soul over flesh and thought.

As I mentioned in the early stages of this thesis, Lacan's theoretical framework might be considered a reiteration of the Christian theological approach that I have applied to the chapters on *Hamlet*, *Timon of Athens* and *Romeo and Juliet*. It is constructed around the ineffable, unachievable desire, the *objet petit a,* and the structures that direct our lives: our language, laws and customs. This linguistic culture is what Richard Boothby calls the Big other 'the nameless and faceless regulator who oversees the written and unwritten rules that direct our lives'.[7] For Hamlet, the Big other is dangerously unstable, for Timon it is contemptable, for Juliet it is escapable and for Lucrece it is editable.

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[7] Boothby, *Embracing the Void*, p. 21.

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