

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03467-8 - Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible

Celia R. Daileader

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1 Entrances: sex, women, God

At the corners of the maps, there are pictures of animals or monsters, or
of the four winds. Marie-Louise von Franz, *Creation Myths*¹

The trouble began when I noticed a hole in a text. It was that simple. About halfway through reading Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (1621), I paused suddenly, frowned, flipped back a page, and scanned, again, the stage directions, growing more and more perplexed. The passage disturbed me for reasons personal as much as editorial, for in it a lustful male and a resistant female meet onstage, grapple a moment, exit from stage, and return some three minutes and one ejaculation later, leaving unspoken either the word "rape" or the word "seduction," letting the audience, or at least the reader, guess. This moment provoked me to look, by way of contrast, at other, less ambiguous episodes of offstage sexual activity in early modern English plays, and to think about the fact that this male/female "eroticism" (as it is often called) was performed without recourse to "real" female bodies onstage, and this led me to begin asking questions I thought could not be answered.

Because no sooner had I discovered this hole in the text than I ran up against the difficulty of finding a language in which to discuss that hole, given the fact that our dominant theoretical discourse does not uphold the notion of a "reality" beyond the text, beyond discourse, and therefore would not regard this as a hole at all – or at least, it would not expect me to find anything *in there*, certainly not "sex" and certainly not "women."² One might as well be looking for God in that hole. And my conception of something NOT onstage, not in view, not palpably present in a single discursive moment (especially given the fact that this "something" was a sexual something), posed a danger any Foucauldian scholar could see coming a mile away, that of the "repressive hypothesis" debunked so thoroughly in a cornerstone text of contemporary theory on the body.³ My interest in offstage sex could easily be interpreted as a complaint about the prudishness of the early modern English theater,

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03467-8 - *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible*

Celia R. Daileader

Excerpt

[More information](#)

2 Eroticism on the Renaissance stage

rather than an exploration of the sexual imagination in all its material and rhetorical splendor. And my focus upon the fictional bodies of women as opposed to the material onstage bodies of boys might appear a naive or heterosexist rejection of post-structuralist theory, rather than an effort to plumb the paradoxes inherent in male/female erotic representations – indeed, an effort to define what this eroticism *is*.

Nonetheless, with these risks in mind, I set out to explore what looked to me like a hole in the text, hoping to return, like a proper constructionist, with lots of clever formulations about the text surrounding this hole, and about the texts surrounding this text, and about patriarchal discourse in general and its construction of “woman” as lack, and so on – but I never expected to find anything in that hole other than, well, a hole.

Then I began having problems. Because instead of focusing on the print surrounding the hole, I continually wondered why it was there in the first place. And that led me to imagine the text without a hole in it, which led me to imagine the “space” it represented, which led me to imagine what “happened” in that space – which got me into trouble.

Because the space of the offstage, I found, was inhabited by all the bodies barred from the stage. Of the surviving dramatic works performed in London’s commercial theaters during the years encompassed by this book – that is, between 1595 (*Romeo and Juliet*)⁴ and 1621 (*Women Beware Women*) – some 95 percent feature at least one scene foregrounding what we would now call “heterosexual” erotic activity,⁵ despite the obvious complication posed by the absence of female performers. And if one scene does not seem sufficient proof of a play’s overall sexual focus, there are other means of charting this territory. In fact, a survey of titles alone highlights the prominent role played by women and sex in these womanless playing spaces. Scanning Harbage’s *Annals of English Drama* for the same 26-year period,⁶ I found 28 titles referring to love, lovers, or lust;⁷ 32 titles containing some form of the word “woman”; 36 titular maids, virgins, ladies, wives, mothers, widows, shepherdesses; 11 titular whores, courtesans, vipers, witches, cuckolds; and 1 *Insatiate Countess*. In addition, I noted 8 titles referring to wooing or wedding, and 6 naming Cupid and/or Hymen (a sum which would have doubled had I counted masques). And finally, I should mention – despite my feminist chagrin – 2 appearances of that ever-popular rape-victim, Lucrece, no doubt a sexualized figure to at least some play-goers. All together, this amounts to 124 dramatic works (none counted twice) whose titles suggest a preoccupation with women, sex, and marriage. And considering the number of dramatic works whose titles do not advertise their obsession with heterosexual couples and coupling (to

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03467-8 - *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible*

Celia R. Daileader

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Entrances: sex, women, God

3

name just a few from the same period: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; *As You Like It*; *Much Ado About Nothing*; *A Mad World, My Masters*; *Ram Alley*), this figure of 124 works in 26 years, or (rounding up) 5 works per year out of an average of 26,⁸ can only be viewed as the tip of the iceberg.

Results of the content survey and the title survey, viewed in tandem, thus present a high and low estimate for the emphasis placed upon sex in these plays; at least 1 text in 5 and possibly as many as 19 in 20 highlight an act that will not be performed – not even “faked,” as it is in contemporary theater, often mimed from beneath bedding or through a translucent screen (methods which do not, by the way, require a female performer). And boy actors aside, the considerable female presence in the *Annals'* cast of starring characters strikes me as curious in itself, given the generally low status of women in the culture which produced these texts. I might add that, in addition to the generic references to women in these titles, there are a large number of plays about prominent (or notorious) individual women, for instance, *The Duchess of Malfi*; *Medea*; *Zenobia*; *The Queen of Corinth*; and, astonishingly enough, *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody*, or *The Troubles of Queen Elizabeth*. Not that these plays are necessarily the sexiest of the genre (in my survey of titles I passed over *Patient Grissil*, *Pope Joan*, and *The She Saint*), but this litany of female names invokes a host of bodies *not* on stage; these are voices from offstage, that space of prohibition.

On the other hand, not all prohibitions are created equal. And, amongst all these erotic bodies, the offstage harbors some surprising presences.

Let us pause for a moment on the case of *If You Know Not Me*. The play was performed on the public stage in 1604, one year after the Queen's death (a sequel followed in 1605); the Queen's death, in fact, may have made the performance possible, as any such representation of the royal person would have been (to put it mildly) frowned upon during her lifetime.⁹ The prior censorship presents a delectable irony: thanks to an accident of the British succession, a woman winds up on the winning side of taboo; for a change, she is the silencer, not the one silenced, and thus is spared the insult Shakespeare's Cleopatra so dreads, that of witnessing “some squeaking” actor “boy [her] greatness” (5.2.216). The two taboos – the one, barring female acting, the other, barring the acting of a particular female role – are curiously counter-poised. Though not a direct critique of the all-male stage (indeed, the Queen worked hard to control all other avenues in which her image might circulate¹⁰), nonetheless, the royal distaste for impersonation casts a positive light on non-representation. While she lived, the Queen was protected from profaning mimicry, unlike her female subjects, who were “boyed” on stage endlessly.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03467-8 - Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible

Celia R. Daileader

Excerpt

[More information](#)

4 Eroticism on the Renaissance stage

But then again, the injunction against female thespianism was also justified by the imperative to shield the weaker sex from a morally dangerous visibility.¹¹ When does regulation privilege the viewers, and when does it privilege the (potentially) viewed? Susan Frye relates censorship of the royal image to “the hot debate among Protestants about images of God.”¹² And speaking of God. One other work in the same pages of the *Annals* also managed to circumvent censorship, although the text does not survive: a play called *Christ's Passion*. In the wake of the Reformation, the English government had been cracking down on religious drama; this particular play was performed in a private aristocratic residence, and thereby escaped control. Harbage categorizes the work as a “neo-miracle” – one of only two in this period – and the title stands out amongst the lovers and heroes surrounding it, the last breath of a dying breed of plays.

From the perspective of our culture, which in general censors sex rather than piety, the early modern attack on the passion plays may appear downright absurd – especially given the outrageously sexual nature of the plays which survived in the wake of this censorship. All those lovers in Renaissance plays had to step offstage for satisfaction, but dramatists found this convention no stumbling-block: in Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters*, for instance, an amorous couple can be heard panting and grunting offstage. In the same year as this performance, 1606, Parliament outlawed the speaking of God's name on stage. By 1609 the bleeding body of Christ had been virtually swept from the English stage, but in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster, Or Love Lies a-Bleeding*, the title-page displayed a prone, bare-breasted, bleeding heroine.

Our leap down the rabbit-hole of offstage sex has landed us in alien territory – a murky space in literary history in which sacred and sexual shift shape and intershade. The year 1609 provides a kind of snapshot for the forces shaping taboo and theater. This year witnessed, in addition to the performance of *Philaster* (a play in which a prince is caught – if not literally “caught in the act” – with a courtesan), one of the very last performances of the Corpus Christi plays, in the remote county of Chester. Like *Philaster*, this performance is forced to make use of the offstage, although for very different purposes: the actor playing God must now remain invisible as he speaks his lines.¹³ Sarah Beckwith, discussing Christ's body in late medieval texts, views this development as evidence of “the separation of voice and body” which went hand-in-hand with “reformation sensibility.”¹⁴ There is, however, more than one separation at work here – not only body and voice, but body and stage, body and audience, body and bodies. I view this pivotal moment in

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03467-8 - *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible*

Celia R. Daileader

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Entrances: sex, women, God

5

theater history – when God exits, his voice remaining, like an echo – as emblematic of the withdrawal of the sacred from the English stage, a withdrawal which is more gradual, more painful, and more problematized than many scholars have acknowledged, a withdrawal whose repercussions persist even today.

I also cannot help but imagine the *allure* of the offstage voice in the Chester plays. I wonder where the actor stood as he delivered his lines – behind the stage, above the stage, to the right or left? Despite the material differences in the playing space which was Shakespeare's medium, I am tempted to position this veiled figure alongside the ghost in *Hamlet* – or, even more daringly, alongside the lovers in at least two Middleton plays, voicing the pleasure and pain of a sexual or literal “death” from an unseen corner of the theater. And whereas it may seem far-fetched to describe the Chester “God” as a sexual figure, it seems quite fitting to call him an *erotic* figure; indeed, his very distance from the stage defines him as such, creating, for the audience, that dialectic of exclusion and desire which theorists such as Roland Barthes have shown to constitute eroticism. The erotic, as distinct from the sexual, beckons even while it recedes.

And it may be that this distinction in terms is the crucial issue here. If we take eroticism to mean consummation of desire imagined or signified, then offstage sex is eroticism *par excellence*. And it may in fact prove that sex only enters into this discussion by virtue of its material absence in theater; in other words, sexual intercourse only concerns this study insofar as it constitutes – through its absence – the erotic effect.

In this book, we embark on a pilgrimage – toward the sexual signified.

Before setting out in search of this theoretical space, it is necessary to ponder the historical questions framing it.¹⁵ What drove God to seek the company of women? What happened between the composition of the Corpus Christi plays and God's exile from their performance? What transformation of English culture created this particular kind of textual hole?

A time-line may be a good starting-point. The earliest manuscript of the Chester Corpus Christi play was probably composed sometime between 1475 and 1500. Between 1492 and 1504, Columbus conducted his voyages to North America. In 1517 Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation. In 1533 the English Church broke with Rome. The year 1538 produced Gerhardus Mercator's cordiform map of the world, and 1543 witnessed the publication of two crucial – and oddly related – scientific treatises: Copernicus' *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, and Andreas Vesalius' ground-breaking anatomy text, *De humani corporis*

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03467-8 - *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible*

Celia R. Daileader

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 Eroticism on the Renaissance stage

fabrica. In 1548 the feast of Corpus Christi was rejected by the English Church, while efforts to put down the major cycles continued, peaking between 1569 and 1580. In the interim, Abraham Ortelius put together the first atlas, entitled, interestingly enough, *Theatrum orbis terrarum*, or “Theater of the World.” Speaking of which – the first English public theater was built in 1576; one year later, in 1577, Drake began his voyage around the world. The Queen’s Men were founded in 1583, the Rose Theatre built probably in 1587, the Swan about 1595, the Globe in 1599. In 1606 the charter for Virginia coincided with the Act of Abuses banning the naming of God on the public stage. In 1609 God was exiled from the Chester stage, while the Virginia commissioners were shipwrecked in Bermuda, and Galileo invented the telescope. By the year 1612 the Corpus Christi plays in England were extinct; that same year, a courtesan took center stage in Webster’s *The White Devil*.

This time-line is as selective as any other. But the proximity of developments theatrical, cartographical, epistemological, and theological draws attention to an early modern phenomenon I will call *boundary confusion*. The voice offstage or outside the spectacle is marked in the text as “*within*,” and the spatial paradox of this signature embodies a vertigo peculiar to early modern English culture – a culture perplexed by the shifting frontiers of knowledge, by changing cosmographies, geographies, anatomies. Let us return, briefly, to that doubly significant date in science, the year 1543. Jonathan Sawday calls the Copernicus/Vesalius conjunction “a remarkable coincidence in the discovery of both macrocosm and microcosm.”¹⁶ And somewhere between the macro and the micro lies that third realm of “discovery”: the Americas.¹⁷ But such drastic shifts in perception can produce disorientation. The drama of the age opens a window into this boundary confusion, and does so – perhaps not accidentally – by way of an architectural structure more or less defined by its circular frame, by its boundaries. At this time, in fact, these structures were becoming more tightly enclosed, and more firmly controlled, as open-air amateur performances in innyards and fair-grounds were replaced – thanks to government action – by walled-in commercial theaters like Shakespeare’s Globe.¹⁸ It’s as if the walls themselves provided the sense of security necessary for the culture to confront its demons. Within the safe confines of what Shakespeare called the “wooden O,” a culture purged its fears and dreams of liminal collapse.¹⁹

This kind of spatial anxiety is evident already in a play just pre-dating my period of focus, Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (c. 1590), wherein the conjuror’s circle yields a seductive, but dizzying, power over an expanding world map. In scene 1, Faustus anticipates the fruits of his forbidden studies in a way that links necromancy and colonialism.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03467-8 - *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible*

Celia R. Daileader

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Entrances: sex, women, God

7

Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,
 Resolve me of all ambiguities,
 Perform what desperate enterprise I will?
 I'll have them fly to India for gold,
 Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,
 And search all corners of the new-found world
 For pleasant fruits and princely delicates . . .

(1.78–84)²⁰

Faustus goes on to ponder walling “Germany with brass” and making the “Rhine circle fair Wittenberg” (87–88), intoxicated by the prospect of manipulating geographical boundaries, creating circular enclosures, little worlds of his own. And the play continues to re-define space, not only through necromancy, but often through theology. Mephistophilis offers a description of hell which departs from the model of the Dantean cosmos. He locates hell somewhere “Under the heavens” (5.118), but can be no more specific than

Within the bowels of these elements,
 Where we are tortur'd and remain for ever.
 Hell hath no limits nor is circumscrib'd
 In one self place, but where we are is hell,
 And where hell is, there must we ever be . . .

(120–24)

The definition of hell as exclusion from God's presence is not unique to Marlowe, but in this text preoccupied with the conjuror's circle, this refusal to *circumscribe* strikes me as curious. Moreover, the speaker's first replies to the question “Where is hell?” set up false expectations: in the medieval cosmos of concentric spheres, hell is “under” heaven and “within the bowels” of earth, but Mephistophilis, after suggesting this model, suddenly uproots it, replacing the solid, unambiguous globe with the more fluid, more abstract “elements,” and finally, discarding the map altogether, defining hell as a non-space.

So much for the macrocosm; what does this play have to say about the microcosm, the human body? There are virtually no women in *Faustus*, and, aside from one bawdy joke about the conjuring circle, there is really no sex either; in this respect, the play calls attention to its marginal periodicity, looking backward toward the fading values of the medieval morality play rather than anticipating the secularization – and the sexualization – of the late Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. Faustus' quest for total knowledge does not necessitate a quest for carnal knowledge (although Helen would be a bonus); but in many later plays the urge to “know,” to “see,” the desire for “ocular proof” targets female sexuality exclusively. Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* (1612–14), for instance, turns the new tools of science upon the body of a woman who strives to evade patriarchal surveillance.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03467-8 - *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible*

Celia R. Daileader

Excerpt

[More information](#)

8 Eroticism on the Renaissance stage

We had need go borrow that fantastic glass
 Invented by Galileo the Florentine,
 To view another spacious world i'th'moon,
 And look to find a constant woman there. (2.4.16–19)²¹

This is one of several references to glass as an optical aid, revealing new worlds, great and small, and hence associated with the hidden world of female desire. The material properties of glass also play a role in discussions of women: “A man might strive to make glass malleable, / Ere he should make [women] fixed” (2.4.14–15). But glass *can* be made malleable, when heated, and this attribute is also used to malign women. Bosola, hired to spy on the pregnant Duchess, detains her midwife with a joke about the “glass-house” and the “strange instrument” that can “swell up a glass to the fashion of a woman’s belly” (2.2.6–10). As I will argue in depth later in the book, the image of the glass womb reveals, in Bosola, a fantasy of visual penetration which is no less violent than Ferdinand’s killing jealousy.

The specular preoccupations of the supposedly sane males are parodied, later in the play, in the babble of the madmen: “Hell is a mere glass-house, where the devils are continually blowing up women’s souls on hollow irons” (4.2.79–80); “If I had my glass here, I would show a sight would make all the women here call me mad doctor” (99–100). And perhaps most telling of all is the Mad Astrologer’s desire for a “perspective,” or telescope, which may draw “Doomsday . . . closer,” and a magnifying glass, which may “set the world on fire” (74–76). Glass, in the hands of men, is a profoundly ambivalent symbol: as a metaphor for the womb, it betrays a killing curiosity; as a specular tool, it can destroy the known world.

The universe of Webster’s play – like that of *Faustus* – has been hollowed out by the tools of knowledge. But the primary victim of this dissecting world-view is the human – particularly, the female – body. Here are Bosola’s words of “comfort” to the doomed Duchess:

Thou art a box of worm seed, at best, but a salvatory of green mummy: what’s this flesh? a little crudded milk, fantastical puff-paste: our bodies are weaker than those paper prisons boys use to keep flies in: more contemptible; since ours is to preserve earth-worms: didst thou ever see a lark in a cage? such is the soul in the body: this world is like her little turf of grass, and the heaven o’er our heads, like her looking-glass, only gives us a miserable knowledge of the small compass of our prison. (4.2.123–31)

At first glance, this seems no more than your standard *contemptus mundi* moralizing – but the looking-glass metaphor adds an unexpected twist, and also introduces (as in the above references to glass) an unsettling ambiguity. Comparing heaven to a mirror seems vaguely

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03467-8 - *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible*

Celia R. Daileader

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Entrances: sex, women, God

9

blasphemous: mirrors are flat, impenetrable, associated with narcissism and deception; they epitomize *worldliness*. A mirror set beside a bird cage will trick the bird into singing to its illusory “mate”; the mirror, in effect, mitigates the bird’s incarceration but offers no final means of escape. What does this metaphor say about our relationship to heaven? It’s one thing to view the body as a “temple,” as a vessel for the soul, quite another to view it as “a salvatory of . . . mummy” – as a vessel for an extract drawn from a dead, eviscerated body, or (to read the line literally), as a vessel for a vessel made of mummified flesh. Not that Bosola cites a single, stable model for the contents of the human body: the caged lark/soul keeps company with flies and worms in his sequence of metaphors. One can gloss “miserable knowledge” as poor knowledge (the mirror creates the illusion of a larger “prison”), or as knowledge which makes us miserable (the mirror reflects back to us the earth/flesh we want to escape), and the point is the same: we are trapped, in our bodies, in our (mis)perceptions.

Bosola’s lecture – like Renaissance anatomy – eviscerates the body, leaves it “mummy”-like. His dark brand of piety also resembles that of the early anatomist, who sought to uncover, in his dissection, the divine truth embedded in the human microcosm. David L. Hodges notes the futility of the anatomist’s moral project: “These totalities . . . remain elusive because the anatomist’s fragmenting method defers and distances the absolute order he hopes to bring to light. For the anatomist, there is always more cutting to be done.” Sawday, likewise, observes anatomy’s ability to deflate piety: “For all their continual assertions that the body mirrored the harmonious orchestration of the universe, what they confronted in reality was something else: a structure of such bewildering complexity . . . that the outcome of every such interior voyage hovered on the edge of disaster.” Therefore, Sawday argues, “The inwardly directed gaze . . . transformed the body into the locus of all doubt.”²² This inward gaze, along with its attendant disillusionment, produces Bosola’s vision of a twice-trapped human soul, peering from the cage of its body into the false depths of a reflecting sky.

The idea of a mirror into the soul is not Bosola’s own invention: Prince Hamlet, berating his mother in her bedchamber, imagines a “glass” which will show Gertrude her “inmost part” (3.4.19–20).²³ As in *The Duchess of Malfi*, though, the issue here is a woman’s sexual secrets, and the rhetoric is incisive to a degree which complicates its Christian intent. Hamlet’s words are likened to “daggers” by himself as well as his victim. Gertrude begs him to stop, crying, “Thou turn’st my eyes into my very soul” (78–79). But Hamlet perceives his cruelty as surgery. He warns her, “Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,” for “It will but skin and film the

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03467-8 - *Eroticism on the Renaissance Stage: Transcendence, Desire, and the Limits of the Visible*

Celia R. Daileader

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10 Eroticism on the Renaissance stage

ulcerous place, / Whiles rank corruption, mining all within, / Infects unseen.” (136–40). Hamlet’s obsession – here, as elsewhere in the play – is with the interior of the human subject, with the spiritual contents of this bodily vessel (as in Sonnet 146, “Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth”). Or is it? For Hamlet problematizes the traditional paradigm by troping this interiority in medical/anatomical language, by speaking of ulcers, of infection. Sawday sees Hamlet as “a prototype of the new scientist” embodying “the struggle of the imagination when confronted with new orders of spatial organization.”²⁴ As revealed in his conversation with Yorick’s skull, Hamlet – like Renaissance anatomy – clings to the medieval belief in the soul, meanwhile fascinated by the body’s literal “insides.”

In Hamlet’s language we detect the collision of two paradigms for inwardness; it is no accident, I hold, that these paradigms collide over a woman’s – and, in particular, a *mother’s* – body. Lear does the same thing to another erring woman: “Let them anatomize Regan; see what breeds about her heart” (3.6.34–35). According to Hodges, this moment illustrates the tension between empirical and moral approaches to the body, a contrast which becomes even more striking in relation to Lear’s earlier, more “traditional” curse directed at Goneril’s womb.²⁵ But Hodges neglects to factor in fully the centrality of the womb in both episodes: in the proposed “anatomy” of Regan, the word “breeds” precedes “heart,” suggesting a (dis)location of the spiritual/emotional center somewhere around the reproductive organs. Once again, the eye is directed toward an ambiguously located “inmost part.”

What characters like Bosola and Hamlet convey through their dissecting rhetoric is a distinctly *early modern* horror of the physical, inseparable from their attitudes toward what we call the metaphysical. There is a direct relation between Bosola’s hollowing of the flesh and his perception of heaven as a mere mirror-trick. (One might also draw a connection between this view of the flesh and his ability to *kill*.) Inventions like the telescope and the magnifying glass, current in Webster’s day, when considered alongside the discovery of the North American continent, add up to an explosion of the boundaries of the visible world, both outward, into the heavens, and inward, into the human anatomy. The seeming availability of total knowledge both opened horizons and made the visible world suddenly hollow. The medieval cosmos, with its fixed spatial boundaries, had offered an escape from our bodily cages through proximity to the holy; the early modern cosmos, by virtue of its fluid boundaries, sent heaven flying: hence, as Mephistophilis says, hell is everywhere.

The neuroses of Bosola and Hamlet reflect those of their culture, but it is tempting to describe these symptoms in psychoanalytic terms. Hamlet’s