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CONCEIVING DESIRE IN LYLY AND SHAKESPEARE
Metaphor, Cognition and Eros

GILLIAN KNOLL

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Picture Macbeth alone on stage, staring intently into empty space. ‘Is this a dagger which I see before me?’ he asks, grasping decisively at the air. On one hand, this is a quintessentially theatrical question. At once an object and a vector, the dagger describes the possibility of knowledge (‘Is this a dagger’) in specifically visual and spatial terms (‘which I see before me’). At the same time, Macbeth is posing a quintessentially philosophical question, one that assumes knowledge to be both conditional and experiential, and that probes the relationship between certainty and perception, as well as intention and action. It is from this shared ground of art and enquiry, of theatre and theory, that this series advances its basic premise: Shakespeare is philosophical.

It seems like a simple enough claim. But what does it mean exactly, beyond the parameters of this specific moment in Macbeth? Does it mean that Shakespeare had something we could think of as his own philosophy? Does it mean that he was influenced by particular philosophical schools, texts and thinkers? Does it mean, conversely, that modern philosophers have been influenced by him, that Shakespeare’s plays and poems have been, and continue to be, resources for philosophical thought and speculation?

The answer is yes all around. These are all useful ways of conceiving a philosophical Shakespeare and all point to lines of enquiry that this series welcomes. But Shakespeare
is philosophical in a much more fundamental way as well. Shakespeare is philosophical because the plays and poems actively create new worlds of knowledge and new scenes of ethical encounter. They ask big questions, make bold arguments and develop new vocabularies in order to think what might otherwise be unthinkable. Through both their scenarios and their imagery, the plays and poems engage the qualities of consciousness, the consequences of human action, the phenomenology of motive and attention, the conditions of personhood and the relationship among different orders of reality and experience. This is writing and dramaturgy, moreover, that consistently experiments with a broad range of conceptual crossings, between love and subjectivity, nature and politics, and temporality and form.

*Edinburgh Critical Studies in Shakespeare and Philosophy* takes seriously these speculative and world-making dimensions of Shakespeare’s work. The series proceeds from a core conviction that art’s capacity to think – to formulate, not just reflect, ideas – is what makes it urgent and valuable. Art matters because, unlike other human activities, it establishes its own frame of reference, reminding us that all acts of creation – biological, political, intellectual and amorous – are grounded in imagination. This is a far cry from business-as-usual in Shakespeare studies. Because historicism remains the methodological gold standard of the field, far more energy has been invested in exploring what Shakespeare once meant than in thinking rigorously about what Shakespeare continues to make possible. In response, *Edinburgh Critical Studies in Shakespeare and Philosophy* pushes back against the critical orthodoxies of historicism and cultural studies to clear a space for scholarship that confronts aspects of literature that can be neither reduced to nor adequately explained by particular historical contexts.

Shakespeare’s creations are not just inheritances of a past culture, frozen artefacts whose original settings must be expertly reconstructed in order to be understood. The plays...
and poems are also living art, vital thought-worlds that struggle, across time, with foundational questions of metaphysics, ethics, politics and aesthetics. With this orientation in mind, *Edinburgh Critical Studies in Shakespeare and Philosophy* offers a series of scholarly monographs that will reinvigorate Shakespeare studies by opening new interdisciplinary conversations among scholars, artists and students.

Kevin Curran
INTRODUCTION

Conceiving Desire

The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was.

*(A Midsummer Night’s Dream IV, i, 209–12, emphasis added)*

This is a book about tongues that conceive – tongues that think, tongues that imagine, tongues that ‘expound’ (IV, i, 205) and conceptualise, and thereby bring into being erotic dreams and desires on the early modern stage. That Bottom intends for ‘Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream’ (212–13) testifies to the capacities of language – and artistic language in particular – to ‘conceive’ his erotic, fantastic, metamorphic midsummer night with Titania.² So, too, does the innate wisdom of Bottom’s synaesthesia affirm that hearts can indeed ‘report’ experiences that ‘hath no bottom’ (214). Because conceiving such bottomless experiences is both a cognitive and a linguistic activity, this book analyses the interplay of the heart, tongue and mind in creating erotic experience. To ‘conceive’ desire is also to beget it, to give it form and shape, as in Theseus’s famous description in which ‘imagination bodies forth / The forms of things unknown’
and ‘the poet’s pen / Turns them to shapes’ (V, i, 12–13, 17). *Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare* explores this generative potential of the erotic imagination, and the language it inspires, in plays by John Lyly and William Shakespeare.

Although Lyly and Shakespeare wrote for different types of theatres and only partially overlapping audiences, both dramatists created characters who speak erotic language at considerable length and in extraordinary depth. Their words do more than merely narrate or express eros; they constitute characters’ erotic experiences. *Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare* locates this constitutive power in metaphor. Metaphor, I argue, gives Lyly, Shakespeare, their characters, and us through them, a way in, a way of accessing experiences as formless and fleeting as ecstasy. Taking my cue from cognitive linguists such as George Lakoff, Mark Johnson and Mark Turner, I begin from the premise that the erotic imagination – indeed, that thought itself – is metaphorical. Metaphorical language ‘bodies forth’ a character’s cognitive interior, an inner erotic life that derives from such embodied experiences as physical struggle and spatial containment, violent restraint and turbulent motion. My approach to dramatic character aligns with cognitive literary studies such as Rafael Lyne’s *Shakespeare, Rhetoric and Cognition*, which emphasises characters, rather than authors or texts, ‘as the sites of represented cognition . . . because of a literary-critical conviction that Shakespeare’s characters do not simply or readily recede in favour of a play-wide network of language’. That Lyly’s and Shakespeare’s characters body forth profound human thoughts and imaginings, fantasies and feelings – that they desire – is a premise of this book. The metaphors by which they think and imagine and desire are, to borrow from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, metaphors they live by.

Take, for example, Shakespeare’s Troilus, eagerly awaiting the arrival of his beloved Cressida in the orchard. An
eponymous character in one of Shakespeare’s most ‘consciously philosophical’ plays, Troilus is always thinking through what it means to be in love. Technically, that is all he does as he waits. But for Troilus, erotic imagining is filled with drama. Thus Jean-Luc Marion writes of erotic anticipation, ‘In the time in which I wait for something to happen, and in which nothing happens, a whole host of things nevertheless happen.’ Here we see a whole host of things happening to Troilus as he speaks:

I am giddy. Expectation whirls me round.
Th’ imaginary relish is so sweet
That it enchants my sense. What will it be
When that the wat’ry palates taste indeed
Love’s thrice-repurèd nectar? Death, I fear me,
Sounding destruction, or some joy too fine,
Too subtle, potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness
For the capacity of my ruder powers.
I fear it much; and I do fear besides
That I shall lose distinction in my joys,
As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps
The enemy flying.

(III, ii, 16–27)

As Troilus stands alone on stage, erotic language acts on him and alters him. It even objectifies him: Eros is the subject of his action verbs. ‘Expectation whirls [him] round’; ‘imaginary relish . . . enchants [his] sense’; and his ‘joys charge on heaps’. Desire happens to Troilus, whose only ‘Ts’ in this soliloquy govern verbs of being (‘I am giddy’), of feeling (‘I fear’) and of loss (‘I shall lose . . . ’). It might be argued that he is merely imagining future events, but his hectic imagining is unmistakably a source of drama in the present. The prospect of future pleasures creates not just present-tense fear (‘I do fear’) but present-tense pleasure (‘th’ imaginary relish is so sweet / That it enchants’). And there can be no question but that Troilus
is different at the end of his soliloquy from when he began. Speaking his desire changes him, and change is the surest marker of action.

Troilus’s speech provides a telling example of the importance of cognition in creating erotic experience. As he details his fear of the sexual pleasures that await him, it becomes clear that he suffers from a kind of cognitive performance anxiety. He worries about sexual pleasures that are

too fine,
Too subtle, potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness
For the capacity of my ruder powers.

To which ‘ruder powers’ does Troilus refer? His sexual potency? His taste buds? His nerve endings? All of these connotations are available but chief among these receptive organs is the mind, the organ that makes sense of sensation. For Troilus, ‘imaginary relish’ – the fantasy of sensation, rather than sensation itself – is powerful enough to ‘enchant . . . my sense’. The double resonance of ‘sense’ (a familiar gloss is ‘senses / power of reason’) reflects the importance of both sensation and cognition in generating erotic pleasure. While the ‘poten[cy]’ of his impending orgasm is the source of some trepidation, it is the acuteness of his pleasures that most unnerves him (his joys will be ‘too subtle . . . too sharp’) because he may not have the requisite perceptual and conceptual acuity to process them. It is as though his conceptual system is too coarse a sieve to capture the fine grain of the ‘joys’ that await him, dooming him to lose them forever. Throughout these lines, Troilus demonstrates that our ability to process erotic experience mentally completes our access to it: both contemplation and action are vital ingredients. The same set of physical acts can produce wildly different responses – from ‘death’ and ‘destruction’ to
‘joy too fine’ – because of the conceptualising mind, which makes eros happen by *making erotic meaning*.

As Troilus’s fears become more pronounced, so do the connections he draws between cognitive and erotic experience. Erotic consummation is often imagined as ‘death’ or ‘destruction’, but Troilus begins to fear a different kind of loss in the final lines of his soliloquy:

I do fear besides
That I shall lose distinction in my joys
As doth a battle, when they charge on heaps,
The enemy flying.

(24–7)

The prospect of such powerful sexual pleasures constitutes for Troilus both an ecstatic fantasy and a nightmare of ‘los[ing] distinction’. At risk in this loss are, first, his cognitive ability to discriminate – to identify, isolate and define each joy – and second, his ability to remain distinct from Cressida amidst lovemaking. For Troilus, it seems that the latter depends on the former. His individuality – his ‘distinction’ from Cressida – is a product of his capacity to conceive his pleasure, to distinguish joy from joy, drop from drop of ‘Love’s . . . nectar’ (III, ii, 20). This temporal cause and effect relation of dependence is, however, at odds with the way that erotic experience demands that Troilus simultaneously maintain a strong cognitive presence (an ability to distinguish himself and his joys) and risk that ‘distinction’ by becoming vulnerable to his beloved. If such simultaneous vulnerability and self-possession is impossible in the event, it proves otherwise in Troilus’s cognition and language. Contemplating pleasure, he opens himself to pleasure. Parsing his fears, he experiences fear. It is Troilus’s ‘cognition / Of what I feel’ (V, ii, 64–5, emphasis added) that distinguishes him as a lover. When he stops conceiving desire, which he tries to do
when he learns of Cressida’s betrayal of him later in the play, Troilus finally suffers the loss he fears. Trying to quiet his pain by vowing, ‘I will not be myself nor have cognition / Of what I feel,’ Troilus forsakes his ‘distinction’ as a lover.

**Metaphor, Cognition and Eros**

Troilus’s declaration is a speech act – a vow – that forges an intimate connection between loving, thinking, feeling and speaking. And yet it is telling that the locus of Troilus’s ‘fear’ and Bottom’s doubt is the mouth, whether Bottom’s speaking tongue or Troilus’s ‘palates’. Such misgivings about the tongue’s capacity to conceive erotic experience correlate with longstanding philosophical questions about the relationship between linguistic representation and erotic desire, both on and off the stage, within and beyond the early modern period. Most theorists have framed this relationship in terms of lack, emphasising the gap between language and the erotic experience it struggles to name. As Judith Butler puts it, ‘we can’t trust language to give us a clear picture of desire, because they’re bound up together. No exposition of desire can escape becoming implicated in that which it seeks to clarify.’ The failures of language to approximate or represent erotic desire lie at the core of the psychoanalytic narratives that have been the touchstone for several generations of scholarship on early modern desire. More recent work on early modern sexualities, such as Valerie Traub’s *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* and Jeffrey Masten’s *Queer Philologies*, argues for what Masten calls the ‘constitutive power’ of particular words and phrases within early modern discourses of sex and gender. Although Masten’s emphasis on the ‘historical and cultural specificity’ of those discourses differs from my own broader view of erotic language and cognition, we share a belief in the generative capacities of erotic language. Importantly, this language need not be fixed or consistent in...
order to be constructive. As Valerie Traub demonstrates in *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*, the obscurities, instabilities and even failures of sexual language are themselves productive. Traub’s impressive book on the history of early modern sexual knowledge ‘pauses over those moments when words fail. Not fail to be erotic – eroticism can thrive on uncertainty, ambiguity, and contradiction – but fail in their indexical function.’ For evidence of Traub’s observation about eroticism that thrives on contradiction, we need look no further than the proximity of Troilus’s ‘joys’ to his ‘fear’.

*Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare* does consider some of the failures and contradictions of erotic language – failures that, as I have suggested, can generate pleasure and shape erotic identities – but I focus on its accomplishments. Both Bottom’s integrating synaesthesia and Troilus’s ecstatic giddiness reveal to us characters who successfully conceive their desires. With this in mind, it is important to stress that desire is understood differently in cognitive theory, which breaks away from Lacanian models in which desire is believed to be a product of the fragmentation of the self. Cognitive theorists such as Mary Thomas Crane argue that desire plays a fundamental role in the emergence and formation of the self:

A cognitive approach emphasizes a feeling of presence (rather than lack) as the basis of the self . . . Desire is seen to be bound up with the emergence of both consciousness and thought . . . [r]ather than a Lacanian scenario of desire emerging from a sense of loss in the mirror stage that is intensified by the acquisition of language.

In Lyly’s and Shakespeare’s plays, erotic language not only intensifies the ‘feeling of presence . . . as the basis of the self’ but, time and again, it makes present an absent beloved. Troilus brings Cressida into his (and our) consciousness when he indulges in ‘imaginary relish’, just as
Juliet presences Romeo on her balcony and Endymion conjures the moon entirely by means of imagination and desire. For these characters, contemplative language builds erotic identities and relationships. It fills the gaps that separate them from a beloved. It shapes their ‘shaping fantasies’ (A Midsummer Night’s Dream V, i, 5).

It may seem odd or counterintuitive to consider experiences such as fantasy, desire or pleasure in cognitive terms. Is eros really a cognitive event, something we ‘conceive’ mentally? Given all of the body parts that are involved in erotic experience, is the mind the place where love or lust or desire is experienced? According to many of Shakespeare’s and Lyly’s characters, yes, it is. Berowne tells Rosaline of his ‘wooing mind’ (Love’s Labour’s Lost V, ii, 413). Helena tells us in the opening scene of A Midsummer Night’s Dream that ‘Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind’ (I, i, 234). Any number of Shakespeare’s sonnets debate this point. Lyly’s lovestruck nymph Telusa first feels the pangs of erotic desire as ‘new conceits’ that ‘breed in thy mind’ (Galatea III, i, 1–2). Of course, the mind does not operate in isolation from the body, particularly when we consider all of the early modern notions of embodiment, according to which the body and the mind relate dynamically, both to one another and to the outside world. Scholarship on humoral theory has illuminated the interpermeability of the early modern body, mind and world, all of which were composed of the same four humours. Connected at the most basic level of material substance, the desiring body and mind were one and the same. Gail Kern Paster describes this mind–body connection as ‘psychophysiological’; emotional, mental and psychic experiences were inextricable from the physical body and the world that contained them. Love in particular was understood in material terms, sometimes as a humoral imbalance, sometimes as a physical disease. Robert Burton devotes the third of the three sections that comprise The Anatomy
of Melancholy to the subject of ‘Love melancholy’, detailing the physical causes, symptoms and potential cures for the illness. Different medical tracts from the period locate lovesickness in various parts of the body (the liver, the eyes and the heart are among the most common), but most agree that the disease circulated throughout the body and brain, emphasising its power to affl ict the mind.

Although our understanding of the scientific underpinnings of the mind–body continuum has changed considerably during the last 400 years, their connection is still understood to be as rich and complex as it was in Lyly’s and Shakespeare’s day. The reciprocal relationship between body and mind also lies at the core of contemporary cognitive theory. Pastcr has noted the similarities between early modern humoral theory and more recent cognitive theories of the embodied mind: ‘such an emphasis on the biological functionality of the passions sounds strikingly like the interest of modern cognitive science in the evolution of the emotions’. According to Lakoff and Johnson, the first of the three major findings of cognitive science is that ‘the mind is inherently embodied . . . in such a way that our conceptual systems draw largely upon the commonalities of our bodies and the environments we live in’. Cognitive linguists emphasise the role of our physical and spatial orientation in the world as a primary source for our cognitive patterning. When Troilus talks of anticipation as a force that ‘whirls’ him, he conceptualises erotic desire in physical and spatial terms. To experience erotic ‘expectation’ as a physical force that can send one’s body into frenzied motion is to conceptualise desire as an action, and perhaps more significantly for Troilus’s particular experience, it is to conceptualise oneself as a separate entity vulnerable to desire’s whims and subject to its power.

Troilus’s experience of erotic expectation arises from the basic conceptual metaphor ‘Desire is a physical force’, which can generate any number of simple and complex turns
of phrase, from ‘expectation whirls me round’ to joys ‘that charge on heaps’. George Lakoff draws a sharp distinction between metaphor and a metaphorical expression. The former is crucially not a feature of language. A metaphor is a way of conceptualising, not articulating, experience. Lakoff defines it as

*a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system.* The term *metaphorical expression* refers to a linguistic expression (a word, phrase, or sentence) that is the surface realization of such a cross-domain mapping (this is what the word *metaphor* referred to in the old theory).²²

Take, for example, the ‘argument is war’ metaphor: the features of wars are mapped on to the experience of argument.²² In this instance, war is the ‘source domain’ because it is being used to conceptualise, or ‘profile’, the more abstract ‘target domain’ of argument. Mapping across domains creates a whole host of entailments that allow us to generate novel metaphors about arguments as war (such as ‘she attacked his thesis’ and ‘I had to defend my side’). According to Lakoff and Johnson, ‘metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.’²²³

Lakoff and Johnson emphasise the power of both the content and the structure of each source domain to inform our experience of the target domain. The skeletal structure of the source domain, according to Lakoff and Mark Turner, is known as a ‘schema’.²⁴ Each schema has slots, which stand for participants in the schema, or elements that are waiting to be filled in. In the example of desire as a physical struggle, the slots would include an aggressor, a victim, a physical encounter, perhaps a weapon, some kind of motive and so on. Each of these slots profiles the participants of the desire domain.
The metaphor itself constrains us to assign particular roles (for example: aggressor, victim) and relations between the roles (for example: the aggressor attacks / destroys/ ‘charge[s] on’ the victim), even though these may not be necessary parts of the target domain or pertain to other metaphors. Desire as a journey does not have a ‘victim’ slot.

Research in cognitive science further suggests that lived, physical experiences produce our most basic metaphors. Joseph Grady identifies a special class of metaphor called ‘primary metaphors’, or deeply entrenched metaphorical patterns, which are based on experiential correlations. Grady discusses the cross-cultural definition of ‘coldness’ as ‘lacking in emotion’. Languages ranging from Latin to Chinese to Old Irish associate coldness with indifference. And this connection extends to the animal kingdom, according to primatologist Franz de Waal, who noted on the Times Book Review podcast that

we say we get ‘cold feet’ when we’re afraid, and that’s literally true, we’ve tested it. It’s true for rats, too – they get cold feet, and their tails get cold, when they are scared. What fear does is draw the blood from the extremities.

There is, unsurprisingly, a similar association between heat or warmth and aroused emotion. Primary metaphors are based on our physical experiences, not on shared features between source and target domains. That is, we feel warm when we experience affection, or any extreme emotion such as love or anger. Moreover, extreme emotion causes the change in body temperature. While other instances of metaphor may be considered correlations, then, there is a class of primary metaphors that have causal relationships.

Because it is both abstract and physical, conceptual and experiential, erotic desire is a particularly fruitful subject for scrutiny using conceptual metaphor theory. Conceptual
metaphor theory would have it that complex ideas and emotions are understood in terms of tangible, physically based source domains, such as temperature and motion. But temperature and motion, to name only two, are key ingredients in the experience of desire (especially the early modern caloric analysis of desire, according to which the heat generated during lovemaking made for a better chance of conception). When we feel erotic attraction, our body temperatures rise and our blood circulates more quickly. We get butterflies in our stomach (another metaphor) and our pulse accelerates. We sweat. Our mouths water (cf. Troilus’s ‘wat’ry palates’). Our bodies move, stiffen, swell. Hence the relationship between physical source domains and the target domain of erotic desire is especially complex. Sometimes we use a particular metaphor because of correlations or shared characteristics between the two domains. At other times, we rely on primary metaphors to elaborate an experience of desire, revealing how difficult it is to abstract desire from the physical sensations it generates in our bodies.

A growing body of scholarship has reinvigorated literary studies by bringing the fruits of scientific enquiry and cognitive linguistic analysis to bear on our understanding of early modern texts. Cognitive approaches to Shakespeare’s plays alone probe subjects as varied as memory and forgetting, consciousness and character, distributed cognition, the embodied mind, early modern performance practices, social cognition and theory of mind, and more. Among these studies are compelling analyses of Shakespeare’s ‘conceptual blends’ by scholars such as Amy Cook and, most recently, Michael Booth, whose work draws from research on imaginative language and thought by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner. I have confined my methodology in Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare to conceptual metaphor theory rather than blending theory, but both are useful tools for understanding the accomplishments of Lyly’s
and Shakespeare’s erotic language. Cognitive linguists have noted that ‘the two frameworks are largely complementary. The conventional conceptual pairings and one-way mappings studied within CMT [conceptual metaphor theory] are inputs to and constraints on the kinds of dynamic conceptual networks posited within BT [blending theory].’ Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare focuses on conceptual metaphor theory rather than blending because my main subject is erotic language rather than the mental processes that produce such language. Eros is always my ‘target domain’; thus, conceptual metaphor theory’s ‘one-way’ and ‘asymmetrical’ mappings have special value.

Missing from the existing cognitive studies of Shakespeare is a full-scale analysis of love, desire or sexuality on the early modern stage. Because cognitive linguistics emphasises the interdependence of linguistic structures, the embodied mind and lived experience, its tools have much to offer scholars of early modern sexuality. Conceptual metaphor theory in particular opens up new ways of understanding how language dramatises the inward and often invisible experience of desire. My book draws on a cognitive approach to desire in two ways. First, I treat language as constitutive of erotic desire, exploring the potential of words to create eros and conjure the beloved, rather than to mark lack, loss or absence. Shifting my emphasis from what Judith Butler calls the ‘exposition of desire’ to erotic desire understood semantically and performatively, I explore the creative, as opposed to the expressive, potential of words. Second, I aim to understand the way in which characters experience eros by analysing how they conceptualise it. Language, according to cognitive theory, is a product of cognition – thus, to study erotic speech is to probe how a character mentally ‘conceives desire’. This book’s literary and linguistic analysis of metaphor credits the role of cognition in erotic experiences from desire to pleasure.
For example, a character like Lyly’s Phao makes almost no distinction between erotic language and action. Upon falling in love with Sappho, Phao tells himself,

Let thy love hang at thy heart’s bottom, not at the tongue’s brim. Things untold are undone; there can be no greater comfort than to know much, nor any less labour than to say nothing. But, ah, thy beauty, Sappho, thy beauty! Beginnest thou to blab? Ay, blab it, Phao, as long as thou blabbest her beauty.

(Sappho and Phao II, iv, 28–34)

Phao’s astounding reason for holding his tongue is that ‘things untold are undone’. The words ‘untold’ and ‘undone’ are increasingly problematic in the context of Phao’s speech because, while he struggles over the question of telling Sappho his feelings, he is telling himself in this speech, and telling us. It seems, therefore, that he is ‘doing’ whatever it is that one does when ‘blabb[ing]’ these feelings. What does Phao mean by ‘undone’? Is it his hope that keeping his feelings secret will make them untrue, or not real, for him, as well as for his beloved? But Phao does not say that things untold are untrue – he says they are undone. What is clear from this line is that, for Phao, ‘to say’ is to do; he makes a powerful connection between saying and feeling, between ‘blabbing’ and loving.

The connection that Phao draws is representative of the erotic language in much of Lyly’s drama. It is probably no exaggeration to say that the language of desire is spoken more exhaustively by Lyly’s characters than by any other playwright’s in the sixteenth century. Almost all of his plays are about erotic desire, and almost all of them have been described at one point or another as undramatic. Traditional scholarship on Lyly’s drama characterises his plays as largely allegorical: that is, interesting primarily for their
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commentaries on Elizabeth’s court and for their euphuistic style, but generally lacking in dynamism.\textsuperscript{32} Although seminal books such as G. K. Hunter’s \textit{John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier} reveal the political reach and context of humanist writers, Andy Kesson points out that ‘the phrase “Humanist as courtier” . . . does not capture anything unique about Lyly, and it has severely constricted our understanding of his work. It also seems to radically undervalue Lyly’s role as a popular writer.’\textsuperscript{33} Hunter is in accord with many other scholars when he argues that Lyly’s comedies ‘depend on a . . . static and passive mode of contemplating and analyzing the conflicting emotions of love’.\textsuperscript{34} Contemplation and analysis do comprise a good portion of Lyly’s drama but this book challenges the characterisation of these activities as ‘static’. \textit{Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare} reveals that erotic contemplation, and even analysis, can be vibrant, frenzied actions on a stage.

Metaphors of anticipation and fantasy, insinuation and confession, permeate Lyly’s plays and give rise to an equally broad range of erotic experiences. Lyly’s \textit{Campaspe} and \textit{Sappho and Phao} stage the overpowering desires of monarchs who struggle to maintain control and authority when burdened by the oppressive weight of love. In \textit{Galatea}, \textit{Love’s Metamorphosis}, \textit{The Woman in the Moon} and \textit{Mother Bombie}, Lyly explores the confusions and misdirections of erotic desire by dramatising disguised identities and changing attitudes toward chastity and sexuality. Lyly’s \textit{Endymion} is one of the few early modern plays that dwells and remains in the realm of erotic desire. It is not hard to see why David Bevington twice describes it as ‘uneventful’ in his introduction to the Revels Plays edition of \textit{Endymion}, since, after five acts of so-called drama, the play ends more or less where it begins.\textsuperscript{35} What, then, makes \textit{Endymion} dramatic, besides the fact that it is, generically, a drama? What happens to Lyly’s hero? Or to pose a more apt question, what does he do in the
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play? The answer must be that Endymion desires. He does not attain, he does not marry, he does not really even court or seduce. He solely, and fiercely, wants. Wanting is the main event, the protagonist’s primary action, in Lyly’s play. And, as in so many other of Lyly’s and Shakespeare’s plays, his desire is dramatised through speech.

My emphasis on the active properties of Lyly’s erotic language builds on the work of scholars such as Kent Cartwright and Andy Kesson. ‘Although Lyly’s plays have been treated by modern critics as static and intellectual dramas of ideas,’ Cartwright argues, ‘Gallathea generates emotional and visceral delight from not exactly ideas, but a pleasurable “confusion” that displays theatrical values one expects from popular plays.’ Our understanding of Lyly’s ‘theatrical values’ has grown as a result of the online ‘Before Shakespeare’ project, which combines theatre history, performance workshops, and live productions of plays such as The Woman in the Moon to illustrate the dramatic vitality of Lyly’s drama. Although Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare is neither a history project nor an authorship study, it is indebted to this pioneering ‘recovery’ work. Andy Kesson’s claim that Lyly’s theatrical innovations made him ‘the most famous writer of the period, during the period itself’ warrants Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare’s focus on what Lyly’s language can tell us about the experience, and the theatricality, of erotic desire.

Lyly and Shakespeare

To date, no full-length study has paired Shakespeare’s and Lyly’s plays. Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare aims to fill this critical gap, and perhaps more importantly, my intention is to make use of the rich linguistic resources that each playwright brings to bear on the drama of erotic desire because such analysis alters our understanding of
both playwrights. Ruth Lunney writes that ‘Lyly’s claim to critical attention has rested largely on his reputation as the playwright who introduced the comedy of love to the English stage, providing an example for Shakespeare and others to follow.’ Generally speaking, when scholars pair Lyly and Shakespeare together, the words ‘example’ and ‘influence’ make an appearance. Critics have long suggested that Shakespeare turned to Lyly’s comedies as models for his own early plays about love. There are a number of advantages to these studies of Lyly’s creative influence on Shakespeare. For one, they credit Lyly’s innovations in the development of early English professional drama. They also contextualise Shakespeare’s dramatic language, and they bring Lyly’s plays in closer relation with those of a conventionally ‘popular’ playwright, thus affirming Kent Cartwright’s claim that Lyly’s plays had popular theatrical value in their own right. A disadvantage to reading these two playwrights together is that, as Andy Kesson warns, ‘the apparent neutrality of the title “Lyly and Shakespeare” operates within a critical discourse that valorizes one writer by denigrating another’. When Lyly’s plays are considered alongside Shakespeare’s with influence in mind, Shakespeare becomes the destination and Lyly is reduced to just one, sometimes glorified, pit stop on the Bard Highway.

Still, I contend that the ‘and’ in Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare is neutral. My reading Lyly alongside Shakespeare, Shakespeare alongside Lyly, is neither teleological nor strictly comparative. Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare resists many of the norms and expectations of two-author studies. A somewhat queer couple, Lyly and Shakespeare quite simply dwell together in this book. Their plays were selected due to their linguistic potential for dramatising erotic experience, and it will be seen that they use the same fundamental metaphors to that end. Some of these metaphors pertain more to Shakespeare’s plays than to Lyly’s, while others are
more emphatically Lyly’s. At times, one playwright’s language illuminates the metaphors of the other. Some of the sharper edges of Shakespeare's compact analytical soliloquies limn the metaphorical contours of Lyly’s longer erotic speeches, and they, in turn, elaborate the interdependence of the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ in the erotic experiences of Shakespeare’s characters. Thus, particular erotic metaphors have led me to some unconventional play pairings: for example, I analyse early Lylian comedy in tandem with late Shakespearean tragedy. I also have introduced secondary literature familiar in Shakespeare studies into my readings of Lyly’s plays, uncommon though this is in most Lyly studies. Guided by the conceptual metaphors I study and the philosophical questions they raise, I turn to thinkers as diverse as Aristotle, Giordano Bruno, Emmanuel Levinas, Gaston Bachelard, Stanley Cavell and Jean-Luc Marion. Their ideas have given us ways to understand Shakespeare’s plays, and I have found that they offer significant insights into Lyly’s genius for staging the dynamic experience of erotic desire.

Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare is organised into three parts, each of which analyses a conceptual metaphor – motion, space and creativity – that shapes erotic desire on Lyly’s and Shakespeare’s stages. Although the three metaphors I have selected are relatively simple, the words and experiences they generate are, in Bottom’s words, ‘most rare’ (IV, i, 203). As Lakoff and Johnson note in Metaphors We Live By, ‘new metaphorical ideas – that is, new ways of organizing and understanding experience – arise from the combination of simpler conceptual metaphors to form complex ones’. I treat the organising metaphors in this study as points of entry into the nuanced erotic experiences of Lyly’s and Shakespeare’s characters. From Bottom’s dream of his magical night with the queen of the fairies to Endymion’s intimate erotic connection with the moon, these basic metaphors impart form, make meaning, and thus make possible the most elusive erotic experiences on Lyly’s and Shakespeare’s stages.
It goes without saying that a comprehensive list of Lyly’s or Shakespeare’s erotic metaphors will be long. But the three with which I work constitute significant building blocks for erotic experiences such as sensation and arousal (motion), intimacy and connection (spatiality), and lovemaking (creativity). As the book progresses, the metaphors progress as well, evolving from primary metaphors based in sensorimotor experience to subtler, self-consciously poetic metaphors. The motion and space metaphors that I discuss in Parts I and II become constituent parts of the more complex aesthetic and self-reflexive metaphor of erotic creation, or lovemaking, that is my subject in Part III. It turns out that this metaphor proliferates on Lyly’s and Shakespeare’s stages, where desire is always artful, always a made phenomenon.

Each of this book’s three sections begins by exploring the underpinnings of its metaphor, drawing from a range of ancient, early modern and modern philosophical models. It quickly becomes clear that some of the most basic metaphors emerge from complex philosophical foundations and engage with abiding philosophical problems. Perhaps the book’s simplest metaphor is its first one – physical motion and stillness – but Aristotle’s metaphysical inquiries into movement, change and action reveal the profound connection between metaphors of motion and erotic agency. By keeping Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare’s philosophical scope broad, even opportunistic, I have been able to marshal ideas from classical metaphysicians, early modern scientists and contemporary philosophers to expose the extraordinary breadth and depth of Shakespeare’s and Lyly’s erotic metaphors. For example, in Part II’s analysis of spatial metaphors, I align the work of Gaston Bachelard and Gilles Deleuze with the writings of early modern cosmologists Giordano Bruno and Francisco Patrizi, who debated the existence of infinite space in the universe. Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare employs a ‘critically eclectic’
approach, to borrow a phrase from David Schalkwyk, who writes in his recent book, *Shakespeare, Love and Language*, ‘there is no single theory or view of love in [Shakespeare’s] plays and poems. He is responsive but not subservient to the concepts of love and desire that he may have inherited from Plato’ and others. Needless to say, I argue that his claim extends to Lyly’s erotic drama.

Part I of *Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare* surveys sensorimotor metaphors of erotic desire as physical stasis and motion, and analyses the ways that such metaphors dramatise the dynamic features of erotic experience. I begin with Aristotle, introducing the different forms and degrees of motion (*kinesis*), potency (*dunamis*) and action (*energeia, entelecheia*) that structure a variety of erotic metaphors – idleness and lethargy, submission and passivity, giddiness and violence – on the early modern stage. Chapter 1 tracks these metaphors in Lyly’s plays and focuses on idleness, an experience his characters conceive less as physical stasis than as movement without purpose or *telos*. Idleness has a peculiar, perhaps counterintuitive, feel to it in *Galatea*, a play in which cross-dressed maids find eroticism not in Aristotelian action or actuality, but in potentiality. Galatea, Phillida and the nymphs who fall in love with them discover the erotic potential of circuitous language that prolongs desire and defers closure. In Chapter 2, I study Shakespeare’s metaphors of stillness and motion in *Measure for Measure* and *Othello*. While some of Shakespeare’s characters are immobilised by erotic desire, others experience desire as a stirring, physically moving, experience. For Angelo, Claudio and Othello, it is both. Drawing on the work of Stanley Cavell and Emmanuel Levinas, I discuss the ontological and ethical consequences of such conflicting metaphors. At first, Othello’s joy ‘subdues’ him but, in short order, the ‘violent pace’ of his sexual imaginings propels him into fits of frenzied motion.
Part II focuses on spatial metaphors of permeability and containment that dramatise erotic desire as a rupture between self and world. Such metaphors raise the stakes of erotic desire when intimacy requires characters to make themselves vulnerable. They compromise their personal and bodily boundaries but they also gain access to new forms of intimacy. These experiences are shaped by the container schema, a basic cognitive structure that allows us to conceptualise bounded regions in space by imagining an inside, outside and boundary. Chapter 3 analyses Lyly’s *Endymion*, whose eponymous hero forges an erotic connection with the moon across the vast expanse of the night sky. Endymion’s investment in Cynthia’s strangest and most distant incarnation grants him access to a form of intimacy that emerges from erotic distance. His metaphors of permeability open Endymion to a mutual and profoundly intimate erotic relation with the moon. In Chapter 4, I take up the erotics of bounded place and of limitless space in *Antony and Cleopatra*. I begin with Edward Casey’s philosophical history of place and space in order to consider the erotic implications of these two concepts. Antony and Cleopatra, I argue, eroticise the infinite void by imposing the sturdy boundaries of place on to vacant space. Binding the void allows the lovers to present this vacancy to one another, enabling pleasurable experiences of self-loss and self-forgetting.

In Part III, I study characters who conceive of desire as a dynamic process of mutual creation. Such erotic relationships often introduce a third entity – a filter, a buffer or an instrument – that mediates between the subject and object of desire. When Kenneth Burke writes about the role of instruments in daily life, he emphasises the instrument’s ontological connection, its potential fusion, with the subject who deploys it. Chapter 5 explores this connection in Lyly’s *Campaspe*, a play in which the painter Apelles and his model Campaspe employ creative instruments – easel and canvas, pigments and
words – to *make* love. Like any object placed between two bodies in some kind of dynamic relation, these erotic instruments invariably generate friction and heat. Lyly’s euphuistic language is, I argue, an erotic instrument in its own right. Providing the lovers with more than a vocabulary, it affords them a conceptual system that gives their experience of erotic desire its form, its medium and its meaning. In Chapter 6, I argue that the ‘Desiring is Creating’ metaphor in *The Taming of the Shrew* also depends upon the generative power of words as erotic instruments. For Petruchio and Kate, these words are fictions – often, they are outright lies – that Petruchio hopes will generate a privately constituted truth. But it can do this only if Kate consents and confirms his untruths. Petruchio may believe that he must ‘tame’ Kate if he is to secure her confirmation, but only their mutual erotic and affective experiences enable them to inhabit the shared reality that becomes their marriage.

Having emphasised the creative potential of erotic metaphor, I conclude by reflecting on some of its limits: specifically, the incapacities of any single metaphor to dramatise eros in all of its complexity. While Troilus considers his erotic limitations ‘monstruous’ (III, ii, 75), I probe the potential of limits – and metaphorical constraints in particular – to tether elusive erotic experiences to language and to the desiring body. For Troilus, as for so many of Shakespeare’s characters, contemplative speech brings coherence to physically incompatible sexual scenarios, making erotic experience startlingly new.

**Notes**

1. All quotations of Shakespeare’s plays are from *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*.
2. A number of scholars have commented on the reach and wisdom of Bottom’s synaesthesia. For a representative example, see Marjorie Garber: ‘The inversion of “eye” and “ear” is a
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structural parody of the Pauline original; that “tongue” should “conceive,” however, is both more profound and more relevant to the interests of the play’ (Dream in Shakespeare, 79).

3. Two foundational books are George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, and Lakoff and Mark Turner, More Than Cool Reason.


7. See Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen’s RSC Shakespeare edition of Troilus and Cressida, 77.

8. Daniel Juan Gil refers to a third meaning of ‘lose distinction’: that of losing dignity. See Gil, Before Intimacy, 80–2.


10. Two foundational studies are Janet Adelman, Suffocating Mothers, and Valerie Traub, Desire and Anxiety.

11. Jeffrey Masten, Queer Philologies, 15.


13. See Mary Thomas Crane, Shakespeare’s Brain, 95–6.

14. See, for example, Sonnets 27, 113, 114, and perhaps most famously ‘the marriage of true minds’ (1) in Sonnet 116.

15. All quotations of Lyly’s plays are from The Revels Plays editions.


18. Burton notes that ‘the Symptoms of the minde in Lovers, are almost infinite, and so diverse, that no Art can comprehend them’ (Ibid., 148). For a comprehensive study of lovesickness in the early modern period, see Mary Frances Wack, Lovesickness in the Middle Ages.

19. Paster, Humoring the Body, 18.

20. See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Philosophy in the Flesh, 3 and 6. According to Lakoff and Johnson, thoughts are embedded in our basic sensory experiences: ‘An embodied
concept is a neural system that is actually a part of, or makes use of, the sensorimotor system of our brains. Much of conceptual inference is, therefore, sensorimotor inference’ (20).


22. See Lakoff and Johnson, Metaphors We Live By, for a more extensive discussion of the ‘argument is war’ metaphor and its entailments.

23. Ibid., 3.


27. Three representative examples include Mary Thomas Crane’s foundational Shakespeare’s Brain, Amy Cook’s Shakespearean Neuroplay and Evelyn Tribble’s Cognition in the Globe.

28. Michael Booth’s Shakespeare and Conceptual Blending provides a more comprehensive account of this work, particularly Chapter 1 (1–14).


30. Ibid. Conceptual metaphor theory is also uniquely well suited to my philosophically oriented study of erotic desire. Unlike the input ‘mental spaces’ in blending theory, which Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner define as ‘small conceptual packets constructed as we think and talk, for the purposes of local understanding and action’ (The Way We Think, 40), the source domains in conceptual metaphor theory are broad and philosophically complex.

31. See, for example, Mary Beth Rose, in The Expense of Spirit, who describes Lyly’s ‘view of sexual love as abstract and impersonal, polarized, static, emotionally simple, and morally predictable’ (35). For ‘undramatic’, see 26.

32. Earlier criticism of Lyly’s work tends to focus more on his prose works than his drama, and it is mostly occupied with close formal analysis of allegory and euphuism in his drama.
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For examples, see G. K. Hunter, *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier* and Michael Pincombe, *The Plays of John Lyly: Eros and Eliza*. Ruth Lunney’s 2011 collection of essays on John Lyly (the first compilation of its kind) offers some useful categories for the types of scholarship typical of Lylian studies over the past half-century. She divides her edition into four parts, one of which focuses on desire. The other three sections study humanism, Lyly’s courtship of the queen and theatrical performance. See Lunney, *John Lyly*.


34. G. K. Hunter, introduction to *Galatea*, 15. See also Kesson, *John Lyly and Early Modern Authorship*, 106, for a survey of similar comments on Lyly’s static drama, from critics such as W. W. Greg and Michael Best.

35. See Bevington’s introduction to the Revels Plays *Endymion*. First, the play is ‘seemingly uneventful’ (21) and then progresses to ‘largely uneventful’ (52).


37. See Kesson, *John Lyly and Early Modern Authorship*, 214. See also Andy Kesson, Lucy Munro and Callan Davies, *Before Shakespeare*. A number of early modern scholars, including Kesson, Valerie Traub, James Bromley, Simone Chess and Denise A. Walen, have identified Lyly’s potential for dramatising queer eroticism in particular. I study queer relationships in *Galatea* and *Endymion* in Chapters 1 and 3, respectively.


41. Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 251.