Introduction: stages of the soul and drama in poetry

The subtitle *Stages of the soul in early modern English poetry* points towards the two genres of drama and lyrical poetry; the focus of this study is on dramatic elements in early modern poems and on the ways in which the soul is shown and understood in such a generic context. The recognition of so-called dramatic elements in early modern poetry is not new;¹ but, as far as I can see, the soul has not yet been considered to be an element that links the two genres. Neither has the counterpart to that reflection been sufficiently realized: when we consider such a link between the two genres, the soul comes to the fore.

In the current context, the term ‘dramatic’ is used and understood as ‘pertaining to, or connected with the, or a, drama; dealing with or employing the forms of the drama’ (*OED*, ‘dramatic, adj.’ A.1.), and as the ‘animated action or striking presentation, as in a play; theatrical’ (*OED*, ‘dramatic, adj.’ A.2.).² The underlying questions are how drama becomes integrated into poetry (and not, for instance, how poems are presented on the theatrical stage); in how far poetry is dramatic in the sense of these definitions, i.e. ‘dealing with or employing forms of drama’ and presenting ‘animated action’; and how the soul helps establish a link between the genres.

One of the most famous examples of ‘dramatic poetry’ during the early modern period is Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, which was dubbed by Thomas Nashe (1591) a ‘tragicomedy of love’:

> Gentlemen […] let not your surfeited sight, new come from such puppet play, think scorne to turne aside into this Theater of pleasure, for here you shal find a paper stage streud with pearle, an artificial heau’n to ouershadow the faire frame, & christal

¹ See, e.g., Lewalski, who describes Donne’s *Holy Sonnets* as depicting ‘various moments in the speaker’s spiritual drama’ (*Protestant Poetics* 265). Kullmann makes a similar point when he writes that Donne's poetry is different from other Elizabethan poetry – a claim that remains to be debated – in its being ‘dramatic', meaning its presentation of ‘dramatic situations’ (121). See also, e.g., Cheney, ‘Poetry and Theater in Shakespeare's Sonnets”; Hunter, ‘The Dramatic Technique of Shakespeare's Sonnets”; Mirsky; Pfister, 'Notes”; Pirkhofer.

² Cf. the definition of ‘theatrical, adj.’: '[p]ertaining to or connected with the theatre or “stage”, or with scenic representations’ (A.1.a.). See also Elam 2; and Cruttwell 90.
wals to encounter your curious eyes, whiles the tragicommodity of love is performed by starlight. The chief Actor here is Melpomene, whose dusky robes, dipp’d in the ycke of teares, as ye seeme to drop when I view them neere. The argument cruel chastity, the Prologue hope, the Epilogue dispaire; **videte, queso, et linguis animisque fauete.** (Preface 329)³

Nashe defines the structure of Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella* in terms of a drama: the argument, prologue, and epilogue. His description becomes allegorical when he refers to character and calls Melpomene, the muse of tragedy, the ‘chief Actor’. The sonnet cycle by Sidney is characterized as a tragicomedy of love and emotion; the poems are perceived as a play, and the play is an allegory of life. The theatre is the world, and life is a play that in this case begins with hope and ends in despair.⁴

If we look at the definitions of *dramatic* as given above, we come to understand that the link between poetry and drama comprises formal aspects, including structure, communicative situation, character etc. We also see that, for example, the sonnet is structured along the lines of drama:⁵ we are first introduced to the topic (as in the exposition of a drama), then the action rises, we come to the peripety in the *volta*, and finally to a resolution. Moreover, we find allusions to the theatre and communicative situations that imitate dramatic speech, which lends the action *energeia*. Drama is accordingly integrated into poetry on all levels: action, character, communication.

During the early modern period, genre was considered fundamental for understanding and representing ideas, if not even the world.⁶ The individual genres as modes meant to express meanings of their own, and whenever genres were mixed or brought into a relationship with each other, this points to a conceptual link; a case in point is the emergence of tragicomedy during this period. Goethe comments on the relationships between genres that are based on their distinctness, *post festum*, in his ‘Naturformen der Dichtung’, when he reflects on the combination and blending of genres as we find it represented in small literary forms, ‘in the smallest poem’, as well as in Greek tragedy.⁷

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3 See also Cheney, *Shakespeare, National Poet-Playwright* 54; and Lengeler 53.
4 Rudenstine notes: ‘If dramatic speech or conversation was to be the new poetry’s main source of *energeia* […] [t]he new poetry was to retain, if possible, all these other sources of drama [the sense of things being present, character etc.] as well, and Sidney’s desire that it do so led to his invention of what was really a new form in English – the so-called dramatic lyric and its sequence. It is no accident that *Astrophel* is the most carefully plotted and the most overtly dramatized of all the English sonnet sequences. Sidney wanted a hero whose tale would be played out before us, whose love would be rendered with such immediacy that it could not help but move and persuade’ (166). See also Hadfield 57; and Austin, who calls several sonnets from *Astrophil and Stella* ‘dramatic miniatures’ (*Language* 17).
5 See, e.g., Edmondson/Wells; Schalkwyk; Sprang; and Baumbach.
6 On early modern concepts of genre, see, e.g., Colie; Dubrow, *Challenges*; Low, esp. the introductory chapter.
7 ‘There are but three authentic natural forms of poetry: the lucidly narrating form, the enthusiastically excited, and the subjectively acting: epic, lyric, and drama. These three modes of poetry may act together or separately. In the smallest poem we often find them united, and, based on this unity, they produce in the smallest room the most beautiful creation, as we can see in the highly-esteemed ballads of all peoples. In the older Greek tragedy they are likewise all brought together’ (Goethe 187–8; my translation).
Introduction

He refers to the fact that specific qualities or modes (what he calls 'Dichtweisen') have been traditionally attributed to genres, e.g. poetry as an expression of the soul, and, ever since Aristotle, drama as emphasizing *mythos* (i.e. action). We need not believe, with Goethe, that these qualities are naturally assigned to the genres in order to see their useful function as they help us realize and describe what an individual work of literature is like. It means learning about the options that the diverse genres provide us with. Thus Aristotle, in the *Poetics*, writes:

For the medium being the same, and the objects the same, the poet may imitate by narration—in which case he can either take another personality as Homer does, or speak in his own person, unchanged—or he may present all his characters as living and moving before us. (trans. Butcher III; 13)

In his reflection on the various kinds of imitation, Aristotle distinguishes between the narrator who 'take[s] another personality, as Homer does', i.e. in an epic narrative, or 'speaks in his own person, unchanged', as a lyrical persona in a sole-talk of poetry—or he may present 'his characters as living and moving before us' as in a drama, with the character on the stage. Poetry and drama thus, by definition, lend themselves to the representation of the innermost thoughts and feelings of a persona/character.

During the early modern period, the prevalent discourses and generic modes tended to mutually influence each other—much in the sense as described by Goethe in his 'Naturformen der Dichtung'. Poetry influenced drama, e.g. the sonnet was incorporated into love tragedy, because sonnets as a genre represented the expression of feeling, which could then be introduced into drama; and drama influenced poetry, i.e. dramatic elements (as defined above) were integrated into poetry. One of the most famous examples for the influence of poetry on drama is the sonnet Romeo and Juliet create together when they first meet during the ball at the Capulets' home: the sonnet here (on the level of content) lends itself to

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8 See, e.g., Barber on Shakespeare's *Sonnets* as expressive of 'a man's experience' (300): 'though they do not tell a story [Barber is against a biographical reading], they do express a personality. They are gestures of love, concern, disappointment, anger or disgust, profoundly and candidly conveyed.' What is crucial here is the notion of experience turned into self-expression, which is where the soul comes into play. Oppenheimer links the origin of the sonnet with the soul and Plato's *Timaeus* (1). See also Simpson, *Philosophy of Shakespeare’s Sonnets* 1.

9 The choice of this term indicates that 'his own person' may be a fictional 'I' purporting to be the writer's self.

10 Cf. the three 'styles' of poetry in Plato's *Republic*: 'the narrative, in which the poet speaks in his own person; the imitative, in which the poet takes the person of another, whom he thus “imitates”; and the mixed, in which the two other styles are combined' (Weinberg 1: 61). See also Bartenschlager; and Weinberg on 'dramatic imitation in poetry' (1: 269). The notion of imitation as mimesis also becomes relevant during the early modern period in the context of the living imitation that is then grasped poetically, e.g. in Thomas à Kempis's *Imitatio Christi* (see below).

11 See, e.g., Spiller on the sonnet as expressive of 'private emotion' (81).

12 See Leimberg's study on *Romeo and Juliet*, where she notes that there was no real source for the expression of feeling and emotion in the early theatre; *Shakespeare's Romeo und Julia* 14. See also T. S. Eliot in 'Poetry and Drama' about the influence of poetry (verse) on drama and his claim that poetry 'should justify itself dramatically, and not merely be fine poetry shaped into dramatic form' (84); and Collier on poetry as an influential factor on York Corpus Christi Plays (*Poetry and Drama* 18); see also Elton on 'Poetry in the Drama' (ch. 10).
the expression of feeling, and its form enables the lovers to put their feelings into words in a literary co-creation.\textsuperscript{13}

The example from Shakespeare's \textit{Romeo and Juliet} shows that, because of their distinct qualities, genres may be combined and inserted into each other to make distinctive statements. This goes not only for the influence of poetry on drama but also the other way around, when drama influences poetry. Both on the early modern stage and in early modern poetry, we find new and characteristic ways of connecting the two modes. As we have seen, the poetic mode as it was represented by the sonnet was introduced into drama, and, conversely, dramatic modes were used consistently in poetry, especially when it came to representing the human soul. Following a tradition from medieval theatre, the soul becomes a character on the stage of the poem, and dramatic action is introduced into poetry, for instance, by the sonnet structure. Allegory thus becomes the way to introduce dramatic \textit{mythos} into a poem; together they serve to represent and imagine inward processes. In this manner, the expression of the self as an expression of the soul is dramatized. The starting point of my investigation is therefore the connection between the genres or generic modes of poetry and drama, and the question of how the soul may be presented and imagined. The one leads to the other: when drama is introduced into the self-reflective mode of poetry, the soul as an entity that inevitably has to undergo decisive developments will come up. And when the individual soul and its development is to be represented in a literary mode, drama and poetry will inevitably form a link.\textsuperscript{14} The reason for this affinity of the soul to the insertion of drama into poetry has to do with the way the soul was conceived in the time and by the writers considered.

\textbf{The soul as inner space and immortal self: psychology and religion}

If we consider our example from \textit{Hamlet} again, we see that in this play the concepts of the soul as the seat of various faculties – growth, sense, intelligence as well as reason, imagination, and memory – and as the immortal part of every human being which is involved in a dramatic action are blended. Psychology and religion are not to be separated. This is to be expressed by the title of this study: \textit{Stages of the Soul}, which contains an obvious pun, to be found in Donne's \textit{Second Anniversary} and throughout the early modern period.\textsuperscript{15} This ambiguity lends itself well to

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\item Cf. Leimberg's reading of \textit{Romeo and Juliet} and the sonnet in drama as an artful emotional expression that lends the text \textit{energeia}; \textit{Shakespeare's Romeo und Julia} 14. See also Bauer/Zirker, 'Autorschaft und Mitschöpfung'.
\item Coyle sees a link between poetry and drama in relation to the subject and foregrounds the sonnet form in this context: 'sonnet sequences allow for the construction both of a narrative and of an inward-looking 'I' figure' (139) that is 'also found in Renaissance drama' (139). He links this to the 'matter of "self-analysis": the subject only becomes fully autonomous once it believes and is encouraged to believe that it is not just self-authored but is the prime object of all knowledge. The autonomous subject turns inward to itself to search for the knowledge that makes it what it is' (139).
\item The \textit{alter ego} of the soul in \textit{The Second Anniversary}, Elizabeth Drury, is called 'She to whom all this world was but a stage' (67), immediately after the speaker's stressing that she has, after death,
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pointing out how closely the two aspects of the soul (reflective interiority and the development of our essential and immortal selves) belong together. Accordingly, it is meant to be read both as genitivus obiectivus and subjectivus, as the stage for the soul and the soul being a stage.

Stages of the soul accordingly refers to the soul on the stage of a theatre, i.e. the soul as an actor (or as a spectator in that theatre); but the soul as an interior space may also be the setting on which a drama is taking place, e.g. in a psychomachia. When it is an actor, the soul, on its progress that is life, goes through various stages up to and beyond death. At the same time, as will be shown, the inner drama of the soul and its faculties contributes to the drama of the immortal soul’s progress. The presentation of the soul is thus doubled in various ways: the inner faculties join with the immortal part of man as (e.g. allegorical) actors going through stages of action and development, and both the soul as the seat of interior faculties and the immortal soul may be considered stages on which action is presented. In the latter case, the immortal soul as a stage may paradoxically present the acting soul itself, especially in relation to the body.

These fusions are already alluded to in medieval drama, when Anima appears as an allegorical character and reflects on her immortality as well as on the influence of the body on reason (when the will, for example, governs it). The soul then becomes an epistemic entity as it is both perceiving and reflecting. This pattern makes its entry into the poetry of the early modern period, as is evident in both The Rape of Lucrece and the Holy Sonnets. In Shakespeare’s epyllion the soul is a perceptive being; it becomes the place of a psychomachia, and it foregoes its immortality (in the case of Tarquin) or reaches it (in the case of Lucrece). In Donne’s religious poems, the soul is a stage; it also appears on the stage that is the poem, it may experience a progress towards and beyond death, and reflect on its being; it is moreover perceived as being immortal. In fact, Shakespeare’s The Rape of Lucrece and Donne’s Holy Sonnets are central to this study because they reflect, perhaps more clearly than any other early modern English poems, on the relationship between the soul as an inner space and as the immortal self by showing it involved in a drama that concerns the balance of its faculties as much as its eternal fate.  

reached a ‘happy state’ (65). ‘Stage’ at this point therefore primarily means a phase in her progress. Only in the next lines do we learn that a theatrical stage is also meant: ‘Where all sat hearkening how her youthful age / Should be employed’ (68–9; Donne’s poems are quoted on the basis of Robbins’s edition, unless otherwise indicated). Shakespeare, in his Sonnet 15, contrasts the ‘little moment’ (3) of perfection with the ‘huge stage’ which ‘presenteth nought but shows’ (4), thereby evoking both the temporal and the theatrical meaning of stage. In Pericles 4.4, Gower as Chorus speaks ambiguously of ‘[t]he stages of our story’ (9) in the context of ‘our scenes’ that ‘seems [sic] to live’ (7). Leimberg in an essay on Vaughan’s ‘And do they so?’ writes about ‘Stages of Sense’. The title of the present study alludes to this, even though the focus is quite a different one: Leimberg is concerned with one very particular aspect of Vaughan’s poetry, namely the not-seeing as a precondition of God’s influence (‘Stages of Sense’ 80) as related to the soul.

This very fact may tell us something about the link between these two authors which has recently been studied in the volume by Anderson/Vaught. See also Kietzman, who sees a link between Hamlet and The Rape of Lucrece.
In these texts, the soul brings together matters psychological and religious as much as poetry and drama. While all of these aspects are combined in *The Rape of Lucrece* and the *Holy Sonnets*, some of them appear almost everywhere in early modern English poetry. The link between psychology and religion is presented, for instance, in Donne’s *Anniversary* poems. The speaker in these poems elaborates on concepts of the soul, focusing on the notion of ‘progress’, which is understood as an advancement from its origin to corruption but also from its being imprisoned in the body to the liberation on the point of death:

Think further on thyself, my soul, and think  
How thou at first wast made but in a sink.  
Think that it argued some infirmity,  
That those two souls which then thou found’st in me,  
Thou fed’st upon, and drew’st into thee both  
My second soul of sense, and first of growth.  
Think but how poor thou wast, how ò bnoxious,  
Whom a small lump of fl esh could poison thus:  
This curded milk, this poor unlittered whelp  
My body, could, beyond escape or help,  
Infect thee with Orig’nal Sin, and thou  
Couldst neither then refuse, nor leave it now.  

(*The Second Anniversary* 157–68)

The speaker’s address of the soul is rather negative: the soul was made in a sink, ‘a cesspool or sewer’ (Manley ed. 183), and it was ‘poor’ and ‘obnoxious’. The speaker seems to imply the view that ‘original sin is derived not from the body alone, but from its union with the soul’ (Manley ed. 184). But the notion that it was made in a ‘sink’ also refers to the sinfulness as represented by sinking ‘inward’ and making the soul red (see *The First Anniversary* 358).

In the passage from the *Second Anniversary* only two souls (one of sense, and one of growth) are mentioned because the third soul is the intellectual one that is addressed by the speaker. This third soul has a self and is identified with the self: ‘Think further on thyself, my soul, and think’ (157). Donne also wrote about the different souls in one of his sermons:

17 The *Anniversary* poems are here used to exemplify a link that can also be found in Donne’s *Holy Sonnets* as well as in Shakespeare’s *The Rape of Lucrece*. Although the soul is addressed in this example, the *Anniversaries* are much less ‘dramatic’ in their overall setup than the poems considered here.

18 Tarogg links this imagery to Donne’s view of the *ex traduce* origin of the soul: ‘Nothing could be further, of course, from a pristine creation in heaven than this image of the stomach or womb as a “sink” – a term used in the period only to describe sewers, cesspools, and other receptacles for waste […]. The subsequent lines only intensify the impression of the dirty conditions of the soul’s birth’ (*Traducing* 1501).

19 This is a slightly redundant characterization given the ‘uncommon use of the root meaning of the word [obnoxious]: frail, infirm, exposed or liable to harm’ (Manley ed. 184). See OED, ‘obnoxious, adj.’: ‘1. t.c. Liable or exposed to harm. Obs. rare.’

20 See also his Donne’s *Pseudo-Martyr*: ‘The purest Soule becomes staind and corrupt with sinne, as soone as it touches the body’ (31; Milgate ed. 161). See also Mahood 112.
First, in a naturall man wee conceive there is a soule of vegetation and of growth; and secondly, a soule of motion and of sense; and then thirdly, a soule of reason and understanding, an immortal soule. And the two first soules of vegetation, and of sense, wee conceive to arise out of the temperament, and good disposition of the substance of which that man is made, they arise out of man himself; But the last soule, the perfect and immortall soule, that is immediately infused by God.

(Sermons 3: 2.85; cf. Manley ed. 183)

The soul is indeed threefold, possessing three different faculties, with only one part being immortal. Donne here seems to try and resolve a dilemma that all the contemporary treatises on the soul are confronted with but apparently decline to discuss, namely how the partition of the soul can be reconciled with its immortality. When we locate the vegetative soul in the liver and the soul of ‘motion’, i.e. emotion and ‘sense’ in the heart, then the immortal part is in the brain, containing further faculties, namely memory, understanding, and will. The soul’s immortality is based on its origin with God; its faculties ‘survive’ after the death of the body because of this origin: ‘But there was a part in every one of them, that could not die; which the God of life, who breathed it into them, from his own mouth, hath suck’d into his own bosome’ (Sermons 6: 18.363).21 This is why Donne, in Holy Sonnet ‘This is my Playes last Scene’, writes that the soul ‘to’ heauen her first Seate takes flight’ (9; see below).

To return to the soul as an entity that consists of certain faculties and is immortal, and that links poetry and drama: the stages it goes through can be immediately linked to the stage and the theatrum mundi metaphor.22 This metaphor is most famously referred to in Shakespeare’s As You Like It, when Duke Senior talks about ‘[t]his wide and universal theatre’ which ‘[p]resents more woeful pageants than the scene / Wherein we play in’ (2.7.138–40). And when Jacques goes on to expatiate on the fact that ‘All the world’s a stage’, he does so by describing the different stages or ages of man. The concept of theatrum mundi, however, is much older, and its relation to the soul is expressed, for instance, in Plotin’s third Ennead, where he writes that ‘every man must play a part’ (III.2.175). He uses the metaphor of the stage to combine it with a very specific concept of the soul: ‘As the actors on our stages get their masks and their costumes, robes of state or rags, so a soul is allotted its fortunes’ (III.2.176). He thus makes a direct link between the theatre (of the world) and the soul:

21 See also de la Primaudaye’s chapter ‘Of the Body and Soul’: ‘the soule, which is much more noble, and infused into the body by God the Creator, without any virtue of the generative seed, when as the parts of the body are already framed and fashioned’ (23); like Donne, he emphasizes the separation of body and soul by ‘death the destroyer of all’ (19): ‘the earthie part returning into the masse of earth frō whence it came […] likewise, that which is spiritual and invisibile goeth into an eternall immortallite’ (19). See also Bright’s Treatise: ‘it [the soul] was first made by inspiration from God himself, a creature immortal, proceeding from the eternall; with whome there is no mortality’ (40). A similar view is presented by Sir John Davies in his poem Nosce Teipsum (e.g. 26.613–24).

22 On the history of this metaphor see, e.g., Yates, Theatre of the World; as well as de Grazia, ‘World Pictures, Modern Periods, and the Early Stage’; Matala de Mazza/Pornschlegel's introduction to Inszenierte Welt; Stevens. On performativity see also Fischer-Lichte; and Schabert.
It is like on the stage, when the actor who has been murdered changes his costume and comes on again in another character. But [in real life, not on the stage,] the man is really dead. If, then, death is a changing of body, like changing of clothes on the stage, or, for some of us, a putting off of body, like in the theatre the final exit, in that performance, of an actor who will on a later occasion come in again to play, what would there be that is terrible in a change into this kind, of living beings into each other? It is far better than if they had never come into existence at all. For that way there would be a barren absence of life and no possibility of a life which exists in something else; but as it is a manifold life exists in the All and makes all things, and in its living embroiders a rich variety and does not rest from ceaselessly making beautiful and shapely living toys. (III.2.15: 23–33)

It is revealing for the relationship between stage and soul that, according to Plotin, ‘here in the events of our life it is not the soul within but the outside shadow of man which cries and moans and carries on in every sort of way on a stage which is the whole earth where men have in many places set up their stages’ (48–51). What happens to man in this life is governed by a ‘rational principle’ (III.2.16); ‘it is like in the production of a play; the author gives each actor a part, but makes use of their characteristics which are there already […] [and] gives each man suitable words and so assigns him to the position which is proper to him’ (III.2.17:17–19). This is the idea that he takes up again in his fourth Ennead, when he describes how the soul is put into a body that is appropriate. His argument is one of decorum and appropriateness, both with regard to action and character. This also serves him to explain how there are bad men and good, because they are allotted these roles accordingly. But it then depends on the individual actors if they act well or not; they ‘are responsible by themselves and from themselves for the good or bad acting of their parts’ (30–2):

in the truer poetic creation, which men who have a poetic nature imitate in part, the soul acts, receiving the part which it acts from the poet creator; just as the actors here get their parts and their costumes, the saffron robes and the rags, so the soul, too, itself gets its fortunes, and not by random chance; these fortunes, too, are according to the rational principle; and by fitting these into the pattern it becomes in tune itself and puts itself into its proper place in the play and the universal rational pattern […] in this way the soul, coming on the stage in this universal poetic creation and making itself a part of the play, supplies of itself the good or the bad in its acting; it is put in its proper place on its entrance and receives everything except itself and its own works, and so is given punishments or rewards. But the actors [in the universal drama] have something extra, in that they act in a greater space than that within the limits of a stage, and the author makes them masters of the All. (III.2.17)

The ‘poet creator’ is a tautological expression by the translator for Plotin’s poies (παρὰ τοῦ ποιητοῦ) as ‘poet’ actually means ‘creator’ or ‘maker’ and equally

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On the concept of the poeta creator see, e.g., Lieberg. The concept of the artist as a creator is an ancient one; earlier in the Renaissance the analogy between the Creator and the poet had been put forward, e.g. by Landino (Heninger 319; see Černy 5).
designates both God and (human) author; this is why Sidney speaks of ‘the heavenly Maker of that maker’ (Apology 89). 24 Plotin here mainly refers to God when creating the world: he assigns man a particular role, just like the poet does in his plays (or poems). How the soul fares depends on its acting – both as an actor on the stage of the world but also as a stage on which internal faculties interact. Plotin points out that, within the theatrum mundi, the soul is assigned a role but also that the ‘actors […] act in a greater space than that within the limits of a stage’, which implies an extension of the metaphor: as soon as the soul (literally) comes into play, the metaphor of life as a play is extended towards the afterlife. And after its separation from the body, the soul indeed continues to exist both as an inner space and character.

In this ur-definition of the theatrum mundi metaphor the focus is on the soul, with the body being only a costume worn temporarily, and thus on the inner condition of man and on inwardsness. This inwardsness, however, has to find expression and be turned outward so that it can be perceived and witnessed by an audience. It is in the soliloquy that the concept of the soul as an entity that is self-perceptive and one that finds itself on its way to its death and beyond in the sense of a progress is performatively brought to the fore.

Soul-talk and sole-talk: the soliloquy in early modern English poetry and drama

The soliloquy during the early modern period was conceived of in terms of both soul-talk and sole-talk (see below), as a talk by the soul and about the soul, and as a form of ‘talking with ourselves alone’, as Augustine has it, 25 in which a self splits itself up when conducting an inner conversation. As a first and foremost devotional practice, the soliloquy made its way into both drama and poetry. It thus contributed in an important way to the expression of the soul in literary forms, and the genre of the soliloquy helps explain the relation of genres by means of the soul as much as it helps explain representations of the soul through genre interaction. 26

If we agree to consider the soliloquy as a soul-talk and a sole-talk, then the exploration and analysis of the self need to be contemplated. 27 In a soliloquy, the

24 See also Donne in his sermon on Prov 22:11 (preached at Pauls Cross on 24 March 1616): ‘Hath God made this World his Theatre, ut exhibeatur ludus deorum, that man may represent God in his conversation; and wilt thou play no part? But think that thou only wast made to pass thy time merrily, and to be the only spectator upon this Theatre?’ (1: 3.207).

25 For a link between Augustinian soliloquy and the early modern period with regard to the notion of ‘inwardsness’, Ferry refers to Thomas Wythorne as an example of an autobiography (1576) that makes ‘full use of self-analysis’ in the sense of inwardsness in that he ‘claims to be writing “all my private affairs and secrets”’ (36; she refers to Wythorne 1) and also, and more importantly, all ‘imaginations and debatings of the matter within myself’ (Wythorne 87; cf. Ferry 36). Ferry also notes that ‘the […] word “inward” […] [was] in fact repeated frequently, almost obsessively, by the love poets represented in Tottel’s miscellany’ (6).

26 See Hamlin: ‘Another quality we admire in Renaissance lyric is psychological realism, the ability to represent complex inward thought in verse, as Shakespeare did in his soliloquies and sonnets’ (xx).

27 For a definition of self during the early modern period see, e.g., Belsey, Subject; Greenblatt 9; Berns, ‘Solo Performances’; Ewbank; Porter; Reiss; Seigel; Selleck; Sherwood 43–9; Webber.
speaker turns to his self – he turns inward. It is this very inwardness (or, rather, its development) which has been recognized as a defining feature of early modern literature. But perhaps it makes sense to rather speak of an oscillation between inwardness and external display: external principles of staging become part of an inward scene, while, at the same time, on a stage the most intimate exploration of a person’s inner state is inevitably linked to the person’s bodily presence, such that even a ghost may appear as a character on the stage.

Inwardness has been described as both ‘a psychological state (and hence subjective) and a spiritual condition (and hence objective); it bespeaks withdrawal and yet is insistently public, for we may only encounter a discursive inwardness, one dependent not only upon language but upon audience’ (Greenblatt 126). Problematic as Greenblatt’s attribution of ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ may be, the spiritual condition is, in the first place, no more or less ‘subjective’ than the psychological state of an individual human being (Donne’s speaker in the Holy Sonnets is a case in point), and even the most inward communication presupposes an audience and is therefore to a certain degree ‘public’. This latter aspect of an audience points towards the notion of ‘self-fashioning’: how we perceive and present (as well as transmit) our self depends on our audience. The self is fashioned first and foremost by, i.e. in dialogue with, itself. It does not seem to be a coincidence that the word ‘consciousness’ in its modern sense emerges around 1600 as it indicates a self-reflexive publication of inner states.

If we regard this ‘self-fashioning’ as a prevalent feature of the Renaissance, it corresponds to the frequently observed enhancement of subjectivity. In her 1989 essay ‘The Motive for Interiority: Shakespeare’s Sonnets and Hamlet’, Margaret de Grazia argued that ‘interiority’ is not something that was given to the Shakespearean text at its inception, but rather a dimension that it acquired during its long history of reception (431). She reads both Hamlet and the Sonnets as ‘the two texts that seem most conspicuously and inalienably to possess a personalized interiority’ (431) and maintains that, in an Enlightenment context, this interiority was ‘discovered’ within the texts as a response to new pressures to unify and legitimate the subject: the first person of the Sonnets and the main character of the tragedy

28 Oppitz-Trotman comments on the ‘allegorical transformation of inner crisis into outward expression’ in medieval drama that followed Prudentius’s Psychomachia: ‘individual struggle was played out in external scenes organized by a multitude of bodies’ (157).

29 See ‘conscious, adj. and n.’: ‘A.2. More generally: having knowledge or awareness; able to perceive or experience something […] a1600 R. Hooker Disc. Justif. (1612).’ The first OED entry for ‘consciousness, n.’ (‘1. Internal knowledge or conviction; the state or fact of being mentally conscious or aware of something’) dates from 1605: ‘E. Sandys Relation State of Relig. sig. L2, Laying the ground of all his pollicie, in feare and ielousie issuing from a certaine consciousnesse of his owne worthlesness.’

30 See Dollimore; Greenblatt; Schoenfeldt, Bodies and Selves and ‘The Matter of Inwardness’. Sánchez anchors this focus on inwardness and subjectivity in research during the 1980s: ‘Perhaps partly in reaction to deconstruction’s elimination of author and voice in the text […] the new historicism in the 1980s countered with descriptions of the emergence of the self in the early modern period’ (18–19). He refers, e.g., to Greenblatt, Anderson, Helgerson, Dollimore as well as Sherwood, and, more recently, Kneidel (see Sánchez 19–20). On inwardness, see also Ferry; Maus, Inwardness and Theatre; Morris; Schoenfeldt, Bodies and Selves; Skura; and Wald, The Reformation of Romance.
In a similar vein, Ralf Haekel recently claimed that the concept of the soul as 'part of the discovery of the human' goes back to the Romantic era (19). Although it may be true that, in an Enlightenment as well as in a Romantic context, these are approaches to the works of Shakespeare that may appear to be particularly apt in this particular historical and cultural framework, the present study contests these ideas. The soul as both an inner space and as an actor on such an inner stage is not just a post-Renaissance construct; it has been developed, to a large extent by taking up and transforming an Augustinian and medieval spiritual and devotional tradition, and by making poetry and drama interbreed, during the early modern period. In particular, the soliloquy (as an heir to the spiritual tradition and as a form linking poetry and drama) served to establish the notion of inwardness in Shakespeare and other writers of the time. Accordingly, to restrict concepts of individuality and subjectivity and their development to the eighteenth century (or later) is an oversimplification of historical facts and relations and, at least in de Grazia's case, based on biographical fallacy, as she seems to identify the first-person speaker with Shakespeare (see 'The Motive for Interiority' 342). None of these critics seem to take into consideration the history of the soliloquy, in which the continuity from a devotional practice to a literary one becomes apparent. This subjectivity and the self-exploration as connected with a focus on the inward state and its expression through the soliloquy have to be linked to the realms of both literature and religion.

But how does such a continuity from religion to performance/performativity in the literary realm actually work? Is it indeed possible that, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of all periods, such a reconciliation of religion and literary performance existed? One might doubt it when thinking of Tertullian and his stance that all pleasure 'is disquieting, even when experienced in moderation and calm, but the theater, with its excitements and its maddened crowds, deliberately aims to provoke frenzy' (Barish 44–5). Augustine, the inventor of the soliloquy,
takes a slightly more subtle view (Barish 52) and asks himself the question (that also Schiller would ask), why spectators enjoy suffering onstage so much.\footnote{See Barish's comment: 'What seems to emerge [...] is the implication that fictive emotion in the theatre provokes something potentially and essentially valuable in us, our capacity for fellow feeling, but that the theatrical context falsifies it [...] Stage plays divert healthy feeling into an unhealthy channel. They invite us to luxuriate in questionable feelings and to flee real ones' (53–4).} In a passage in his Soliloquias, Augustine distinguishes between ‘the fallacious’ and ‘the fabulous’, i.e. intentional deception and telling tales; the first is linked to the ‘desire to deceive’, while the latter to the ‘desire to please’ (Soliloquias 2.9; see Barish 55). Therefore, ‘[p]oems, jokes, and fables should not be thought of as false at all, argues Augustine’s Reason, because they are unable to be true’ (55). Augustine goes on to comment on actors in a similar vein: ‘Neque enim falsa esse volunt aut ullo adpetitu suo falsa sunt […] unde in speculo vera hominis imago, si non falsus homo?’ (Soliloquias 2.10).\footnote{‘Pictures, images etc. do not wish to be false and are not false because of any desire of their own […] Or how could the image of the man in the mirror be true, if it were not a false man?’ (trans. Watson 95).} The truth of performance is embedded in an understanding of acting in accordance with an ethics of one’s true self: an actor can only be true to himself when acting. Performance and truth therefore do not exclude each other. The soliloquy, when it becomes a performative rather than a devotional mode, inherits its quality as a device that does not deceive but helps towards the recognition of truth (e.g. with regard to the soul), as it is ‘truly’ spoken and participates in established dialogic models of ascertaining the truth.

If we regard poetry and drama as genres in which the soliloquy is used as a means to turn an inner debate, a speaker’s innermost thoughts and feelings, to the outside and present them to the world, this entails not only that psychology and religion are integrated into literary expression but also that self and soul are defined as performative. The speaker finds himself on a stage (literally, in the theatre, or, metaphorically, on the stage that is the poem or even the world); he or she performs and presents ‘on the stage a new conception of the free-standing individual’ (Belsey, Subject 43). Individuality, interiority, and performativity are linked and brought together in the genre of the soliloquy.\footnote{This reference to ‘performativity’ argues against the definition by Austin: ‘a performative utterance will, for example, be in a peculiar way hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in a soliloquy. [...] Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways parasitic upon its normal use’ (How to Do Things With Words 22). Austin ignores the whole context of illusion that is, however, most relevant with regard to literary texts: we take these utterances for real in the context of a play or in a poem as we take the speaker seriously. One may call this, with Coleridge, ‘willing suspension of disbelief’; or one may refer to the imperative put forward by the Prologue in Henry V: ‘let us […] / On your imaginary forces work’ (17–18).}

Even though we may nowadays associate the soliloquy more or less exclusively with drama, this is not a study of the soliloquy in drama, nor about the soliloquy in general. The genre of the soliloquy rather serves to provide a point of reference and a tradition through which we realize what happens when poetry becomes the
stage of the soul and when the soul becomes a stage in poetry. The genre of the soliloquy during the early modern period was used both in poetry and drama to convey inwardness/interiority and to thus give expression to the self. In fact, we can only understand how the nature of dramatic soliloquy as a new form of self-reflection, of making the private public, was established in Elizabethan drama by considering poetry as a genre in which the speaker enacts a dialogue with and of the soul; at the same time, the dynamic reflection on the fate of the soul in early modern English poetry would have been impossible without incorporating dramatic elements. The fact has gone widely unnoticed that the soliloquy, made prominent in both poetry and drama, provides, via the soul, a link between the two genres.

**Stage and stages: Shakespeare and Donne**

When we go back to the epithet *dramatic* as describing poetry, it makes sense to consider both Shakespeare and Donne: in their poems, the double perspective on the soul – as actor and as stage – becomes central. No writer other than Shakespeare creates a long poem as *The Rape of Lucrece* in which an internal drama of the soul is enacted; and no writer other than Donne in his *Holy Sonnets* manages to turn sonnets into soliloquies about and of the soul.  

*The Rape of Lucrece*, Shakespeare’s early epyllion, is dramatic in that it foregrounds the soul which becomes both a stage and an actor in the course of events; moreover, the soul serves to lend the action motivation: we are given insight into the psychology of both Tarquin and Lucrece. For one, we are presented with Tarquin’s inner struggle and psychomachia when it comes to his decision whether or not to give in to his desire and rape Lucrece. The fight takes place on the stage of his soul, between will and reason, and he eventually follows his ‘desire’, which will bring about his downfall. After the rape, the focus is on Lucrece and her inner struggle and debate in relation to her suicide. In her case, the soul is portrayed as a character in its own right that, after the body has been tainted, is struggling to stay clean. The drama of Tarquin and Lucrece culminates when their relationship, which is marked by contrast and develops into antagonism, turns into an uncanny exchange: thus, when Lucrece finally kills herself, her hand becomes that of Tarquin. This exchange is established through the body–soul relationship and transmitted linguistically by means of parallelism and chiasmus.

Shakespeare uses references to the soul and its portrayal (both with regard to Tarquin and Lucrece) in order to endow the story with a psychological dimension.

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37 Both Shakespeare and Donne have been called ‘dramatic’ poets (see, e.g., Cruttwell 42), and often primarily with regard to their biographical background. Shakespeare’s work as an actor and playwright and Donne’s visits to the theatre in his youth (Cruttwell 42) certainly make the play a ‘natural’ metaphor that was particularly apt to express deep emotions. See also Cruttwell’s conclusion that ‘the dramatic personality is as native to Donne as it is to Shakespeare’ (48). Cruttwell is representative of a multitude of critics, e.g. Patrick Cheney, Margaret Fetzer, Kathleen Lea, Edmund Miller, and others. The authors’ biographical background should, however, only be secondary; what counts is how both enact dramas of the soul in their poems in a unique way.
In how far this is innovative becomes particularly clear when comparing *Lucrece* with another popular epyllion of the period, Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* (1592–93, i.e. during the same period of theatre closings when *The Rape of Lucrece* was written). Marlowe's, like Shakespeare's, is a story of chastity (‘Chaste Hero’ 1.178) and desire, with the difference that, in Marlowe's epyllion, both characters give in to their desire, based on their mutual love at first sight (see 1.159–66; 176). In Shakespeare's *Lucrece* it is Tarquin who surrenders to his passion, while Lucrece stays chaste. The major dissimilarity, however, lies in the fact that the soul does not really play a part in Marlowe's epyllion. The word is mentioned twice, both times as an epithet ‘poor soul’ to describe first Hero (‘she poor soul assays’ 1.362) and then Leander (‘the poor soul ’gan to cry’ 2.177). And although the narrator at one point speaks of Hero's ‘words’ that 'made war' (1.331), he also makes it very clear that her ‘looks yielded’ (331) before that, ‘[w]herewith she yielded, that was won before’ (1.330). The assumed struggle turns out not to be one, elements of psychology are lacking from Marlowe's epyllion, and the focus is a different one, namely on the erotic encounter between the two protagonists. Shakespeare, on the other hand, creates an epyllion that is likewise based on ancient myth but renders it psychological by making the soul its focus.

In some of Donne's *Holy Sonnets* we can observe a similar emphasis on the soul. Donne makes the sonnets dramatic by endowing them with action but also by turning the poem into a stage on which the soul appears as a character. Holy Sonnet ‘Oh my black Soule’ is representative of this technique: the sonnet is a miniature drama both because of dramatic allusion, e.g. to medieval morality plays, and because of its structure which is in accordance with the genre requirements of comedy familiar to Elizabethans from Donatus's commentary on Terence. As Heywood described the dramatic genres in his *Apology for Actors* (1612): ‘Tragedies and Comedies, faith Donatus, had their beginning a rebus divinis, from divine sacrifices; they differ thus: in comedies, turbulenta prima, tranquilla ultima; in tragedies, tranquilla prima, turbulenta ultima, e.g. Comedies begin in trouble, and end in peace; tragedies begin in calms, and end in tempest’ (*An Apology for Actors* Fv.). This plot pattern is adhered to by Donne, whose speaker moves from an exposition, in which he describes the troublesome calling of death, to a peripety, when he remembers grace, and the final stage of his redemption in his Holy Sonnet ‘Oh my black Soule’.

In this sonnet the speaker moreover addresses his soul and turns the poem into a soliloquy. The soul becomes an issue in Donne's *Holy Sonnets* whenever the speaker is confronted with death and forced to reflect on his sins and, therefore, his salvation. In Holy Sonnet ‘This is my Playes last Scene’, the sonnet is turned into a stage of the speaker's imagination: again, he reflects on the final moment in his life and imagines what will happen to his body and soul – and also to that

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38 Donatus: ‘inter tragœdiam autem et comoediam cum multa tum inprimis hoc distat, quod in comoedia mediocres fortunae hominum, parui impetus periculorum laetique sunt exitus actionum, at in tragœdïa omnia contra, ingentes personae, magni timores, exitus funesti habentur; et illic prima turbulenta, tranquilla ultima, in tragœdia contrario ordine res aguntur’ (1: 21).
entity which constitutes himself, ‘I’. Again, the sonnet is structured along the lines of drama, but in this case we both witness a soul which is a partner of the self in the triadic character constellation of ‘My body and Soule, and I’, and a soul which envisages becoming identical with the self when it has been separated from the body and purged from the personified sins. Moreover, the sonnet becomes dramatic when the speaker presents himself in an act of persuasion serving to show God a way of saving his soul, and at the same time enacting the moment of delivery in the language of the poem.

Early modern poetry becomes dramatic whenever the soul is at its focus; and the soul comes to the fore, whenever the link between poetry and drama can be observed. Both Shakespeare’s *The Rape of Lucrece* and Donne’s *Holy Sonnets* exemplify this double motion: they enact the drama of the soul in various ways, by alluding to psychomachia, by addressing the soul, by allegorizing it, and thus make their poems expressive of interior states, of inwardness, and the self. In both Shakespeare and Donne, the stage of the poem becomes a stage of the soul, and on this stage, the soul is going through different stages towards immortality.