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# Gendered Secrecy in Shakespeare's *Lucrece*

Aleida Auld<sup>1</sup>

This essay offers a critical, historical, and authorial analysis of the intersection of gender and secrecy in William Shakespeare's *Lucrece*. The author of this essay locates within the poem a traditional view in which females are either transparent and virtuous, or duplicitous and promiscuous, with little possibility for greater moral complexity. This dichotomous view emerges in the voices of the narrator and of Lucrece, who considers herself incapable of emotional opacity, and acts in response to her self-perceived transparency. It also marks the editorial response to the poem – in the seventeenth century, as shown by Sasha Roberts, and in the eighteenth, as shown here. The analysis covers little or never explored eighteenth-century responses in print to Shakespeare's poem, including *Tarquin and Lucrece, or, The Rape: A Poem* (1768), part of the public uproar over a real-life rape scandal in 1767-1768. Apart from the main narrator of the poem, *Lucrece* also contains a distinct authorial voice that comments freely on human nature. This brief but broad commentary indiscriminately endows moral complexity, irrespective of gender, thus suggesting that in Shakespeare's *Lucrece* there are the means both for entrenching traditional notions of secrecy and gender and for undermining them.

By many accounts, *Lucrece* is among the most straightforward of William Shakespeare's printed poetry books. Unlike *The Passionate Pilgrim* (1599),

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which contains many apocryphal poems, or the *Sonnets* (1609), which teasingly evoke real-life correspondences, *Lucrece* (1594) was carefully printed by authorial consent with a dedication to the Earl of Southampton signed “William Shakespeare” (Shakespeare, *Oxford* 42). Despite this clarity of presentation and transmission, the poem itself demonstrates a rigorous and relentless interest in secrecy – in thought, motive and action, and with respect to virtue and gender.

This interest begins with the prefixed “Argument”: while besieging the neighbouring town of Ardea, the leaders of the Roman army gather one evening in the tent of Prince Tarquin, where they boast of their wives’ virtues. Rivalry amongst them prompts a spontaneous trip to Rome, “intending by their secret and sudden arrival to make trial” of one another’s claims (ll. 13-14).<sup>2</sup> They visit the home of Collatine, whose wife, Lucrece, is the emblem of virtue, spinning amongst her maids. “[I]nflamed with Lucrece’ beauty, yet smothering his passions for the present,” Tarquin carries on until able to withdraw “privily” from the group and return alone (ll. 20-22, 23). While lodged by Lucrece for the night, Tarquin “treacherously stealeth into her chamber,” where he rapes her (l. 26). Later, in the presence of her husband Collatine, her father, and others, Lucrece “revealed the actor [Tarquin], and the whole manner of his dealing, and withal suddenly stabbed herself” (ll. 34-35).

Through verbal parallels and contrasts, these selections from the “Argument” invite us to consider how the male leaders’ secret and sudden visit to Rome, and Tarquin’s secrecy throughout, compare to Lucrece’s revelation and sudden suicide. The poem itself, I argue, takes up these issues by both magnifying and problematising the relationship between secrecy and gender. In this essay, I explore this relationship from the perspectives of the narrator, of characters, of readers of later times, and of the author himself. Within Shakespeare’s *Lucrece* are the means for both entrenching traditional notions of secrecy and gender and for undermining them. Indeed, what this poem lays bare is an author who implicates both himself and his readers in this tragic legend by momentarily dissolving gendered boundaries in our shared humanity.

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<sup>2</sup> All quotations from *Lucrece* are from Shakespeare, *Oxford*.

## Sanctioning Secrecy: Narrators and Characters

The “Argument” contrasts Lucrece’s act of revealing with Tarquin’s act of concealing. The poem picks up this topic, since the ability to conceal, and the *perceived* ability to conceal, inform the way Lucrece carries out her revelation and suicide. From the perspective of other characters, which includes the narrator, Lucrece’s virtue necessitates transparency while male virtue does not. Secrecy in the former would be sanctioned, or punished; secrecy in the latter may be sanctioned, or approved. I show how this double standard emerges in the commentary of the narrator, the comments by Lucrece, and the descriptions of male characters.

The morning after the rape, the narrator intervenes at length to liken women’s minds to wax, and men’s minds to marble. In this case, the figurative make-up of the mind produces a temperament of sensitivity and sympathy, but also limits moral capacity. The passage begins with an encounter between Lucrece and her maid:

A pretty while these pretty creatures stand,  
Like ivory conduits coral cisterns filling.  
One justly weeps; the other takes in hand  
No cause but company of her drops’ spilling.  
Their gentle sex to weep are often willing,  
Grieving themselves to guess at others’ smarts,  
And then they drown their eyes, or break their hearts.

1235

For men have marble, women waxen minds,  
And therefore are they formed as marble will:  
The weak oppressed, th’ impression of strange kinds  
Is formed in them by force, by fraud, or skill.  
Then call them not the authors of their ill,  
No more than wax shall be accounted evil  
Wherein is stamped the semblance of a devil.

1240

1245  
[. . .]  
Wherein is stamped the semblance of a devil.

Though man can cover crimes with bold, stern looks,  
Poor women’s faces are their own faults’ books.

1253

The narrator links female sympathy and impressionability to waxen minds, in contrast to the imperturbable “marble” minds of men (ll. 1233-41). Then, in an abrupt shift, he redirects these ideas of gendered nature towards moral responsibility: like pliant and malleable wax, women may be manipulated by force, fraud, and skill. By denying women responsibility for their actions – “call them not the authors of

their ill" (l. 1244) – they are figured as passive participants with circumscribed moral capacity. They are not the authors of deception – “Poor women’s faces are their own faults’ books” (l. 1253) – but the “waxen” tablets or books transparently read, and written upon, by others.

Like John Roe and Amy Greenstadt, I argue that Lucrece does in fact fulfil this idea of total emotional transparency, particularly before the rape.<sup>3</sup> Tarquin (along with the narrator) reads the “silent war of lilies and of roses” that covers her face as a struggle between blushing Beauty and white Virtue (ll. 50-77, esp. 71). Later, Tarquin reflects on how Lucrece initially turned red with fear of bad news about Collatine (ll. 253-63). In both cases, there is a direct relationship between what Lucrece feels and the way she looks; there is no buffer between her inner self and her outward appearance. We learn from the narrator, moreover, that Lucrece’s innocence and lack of experience mean that she does not suspect Tarquin and cannot “read the subtle shining seccries” of his eyes (see ll. 85-105, esp. 101). Literacy is twofold, reading and writing. When it comes to deception, Lucrece can do neither.

It is only after the rape that Lucrece expresses a desire for these skills that she lacks. She wishes, for example, to be able to hide her emotions in the dark of night, and to keep them from appearing on her face, but perceives herself unable to do so, stating: “[f]or day [...] Night’s scapes doth open lay, / And my true eyes have never practised how / To cloak offences with a cunning brow” (ll. 747-49). Lucrece also expects her eyes to betray guilt by weeping, and anticipates that even those unable to read learned books, “the illiterate,” may read her “trespass” in the light of “tell-tale day” (ll. 750-56, 806-12). Lucrece and the narrator thus concur, in part erroneously, that she is unable to conceal information.<sup>4</sup> What is new after the rape is not her *inability* to hide something, but her *wish* to do so.

Lucrece’s suicide takes on new meaning in the context of her desire for secrecy and self-perceived transparency. She contemplates suicide several times, including as a way to abort pregnancy (ll. 1058-64), restore honour (ll. 1184-90), spur revenge (ll. 1191-97), and exert control over her posthumous reputation (ll. 1051-57). But Lucrece also fashions her

<sup>3</sup> On Lucrece’s initial lack of self-division, see Shakespeare, *Poems* 28 and Greenstadt, *Rape and the Rise of the Author* 64.

<sup>4</sup> Some moments in *Lucrece* suggest that the protagonist is not as transparent as she believes. Most notably, when giving the letter to the messenger, she believes erroneously that his rosy blush is a response to her shame, and she responds by blushing herself. He reacts by reddening even more, thus perpetuating a cycle of mutual misreading (see ll. 1331-58).

suicide as a means for revealing the rape on her terms, rather than involuntarily. At the close of her complaints on Night, Opportunity, and Time, Lucrece declares:

For me, I am the mistress of my fate,  
And with my trespass never will dispense,  
Till life to death acquit my forced offence.

I will not poison thee [Collatine] with my attaint,  
Nor fold my fault in cleaned coined excuses;  
My sable ground of sin I will not paint  
To hide the truth of this false night's abuses.  
My tongue shall utter all; mine eyes, like sluices,  
As from a mountain spring that feeds a dale,  
Shall gush pure streams to purge my impure tale. (1069-78)

This is the first time that Lucrece seizes on the voluntary revelation of her story. Yet at no point in the poem does she indicate that she believes herself capable of emotional opacity (even though she wishes she were). Lucrece thus reframes her coordinated revelation-suicide as a choice that allows her simultaneously to disclose the rape and reclaim the narrative. Rather than being an open book for all to read, Lucrece chooses to close the book by ending her life.

The transparency that defines Lucrece's virtue contrasts with the various mechanisms used for hiding by men in the poem. Francis Bacon's essay "Of Simulation and Dissimulation" (1625) may help us disentangle morality from the strategic uses of "Hiding, and Vailing of a Mans Selfe," in Bacon's words (21). Drawing on classical authors, Bacon identifies several degrees of hiding:

The first *Closenesse*, *Reservation*, and *Secrecy*; when a Man leaveth himselfe without Observation, or without Hold to be taken, what he is. The second *Dissimulation*, in the *Negative*; when a man lets fall Signes, and Arguments, that he is not, that he is. And the third *Simulation*, in the *Affirmative*; when a Man industriously, and expressly, faigns, and pretends to be, that he is not. (21)

Bacon also discusses openness, which he arguably considers an additional form of hiding.<sup>5</sup> The main differences between Bacon's conception of dissimulation and simulation are agency and degree: dissimulation lets fall signs (presumably given by others) that feed falsehoods,

<sup>5</sup> See Dzelzainis 333-34.

while simulation actively professes and creates falsehoods. Dissimulation occasionally complements and preserves secrecy, while simulation tends towards culpability and vice (21-22). Although Bacon does not recommend simulation, it has some advantages, namely “to lay asleepe Opposition, and to Surprize” (22).

Bacon’s types of hiding apply to Shakespeare’s male characters without necessarily compromising their virtue. Both Lucrece and her husband Collatine lack Bacon’s “*Closeness, Reservation, and Secrecy*,” since Lucrece reveals her emotions indiscriminately in the “silent war of lilies and of roses” (l. 71), and Collatine boasts openly about her to his comrades. While Lucrece’s transparent display of emotions is linked to her beauty and virtue (e.g., ll. 50-77), Collatine’s revelation of his wife’s qualities is foolish. The narrator condemns him for “unwisely” praising Lucrece, and acting as “the publisher / Of that rich jewel he should keep unknown / From thievish ears” (ll. 10-11, 33-35). Although different situations – one displaying emotions, the other giving verbal information – I would suggest that they generally align with Bacon’s ideas on secrecy, which comprehend both types of disclosure. What this suggests is that within the poem, male virtue opposes foolish indiscretion and encourages secrecy to a degree. Within this paradigm, Lucrece is the secret object to be jealously guarded (“rich jewel”), as well as the model of transparent virtue.

Two men in the poem, moreover, employ Bacon’s strategy of simulation and possess, pace Heather Dubrow, differing degrees of virtue from one another.<sup>6</sup> Tarquin, of course, feigns goodwill but intends harm towards his host. Less obviously, Brutus, a lesser character in Shakespeare’s poem but a vital actor in the legend, simulates the fool until an opportune moment to take political action. Upon Lucrece’s death, he “throws that shallow habit by, / Wherein deep policy did him disguise,” and so utilises her tragedy to overthrow the monarchy (ll. 1814-15). As Anna Swärdh points out, the narrator describes Brutus as having “advisedly” armed his long-hid wits (Swärdh 152; l. 1816). Thus both Tarquin and Brutus actively deceive, but one is clearly immoral, while the other is glancingly admired for his strategic concealment.

The male figures in the poem who ostensibly come closest to Lucrece’s model of transparency – if not transparent virtue – are Ajax and

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<sup>6</sup> Dubrow assimilates the deceptive appearances of Tarquin and Brutus, and gives them comparable moral standing: “the man [Brutus] who vows to avenge Lucrece proves to be quite as morally ambiguous – or even dubious – as revengers on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage [...] Both Tarquin and Brutus mislead others through their deceptive appearances; and both exploit Lucrece’s body for their own ends” (126).

Ulysses. In the ekphrastic description of the painting on the Fall of Troy, it is observed:<sup>7</sup>

In Ajax and Ulysses, O what art  
Of physiognomy might one behold!  
The face of either ciphered either's heart;  
Their face their manners most expressly told. (ll. 1394-97)

“Cipher” means “express, show forth [...] delineate” (*OED* 3), but that straightforward representation is immediately subverted by the “mild glance that sly Ulysses lent” and by his legendary reputation for ruse (l. 1399). A secondary meaning of cipher – “express by characters [...] esp. to write in cipher or cryptogram” (*OED* 2) – lurks below the surface in this system of signs, with the potential for intentional and unintentional misdirection and misinterpretation. Suspicion towards the descriptions of Ajax and Ulysses is reinforced by that of grave Nestor, immediately following, whose sober gesture “beguiled attention, charmed the sight” of listeners who, in turn, “seemed to swallow up his sound advice, / [...] /As if some mermaid did their ears entice” (ll. 1404, 1409, 1411). This belongs to the “Conceit deceitful” work of the painting in which art tricks the eye (l. 1423, Shakespeare, *Oxford* 318n.). Dubrow’s argument that the faces of Ajax and Ulysses have “signs that by their very nature facilitate clear communication” fails to account for the irony and linguistic ambiguity in the description of them, and of the painting more generally (134). Like “cipher,” sanction goes both ways: male secrecy may be sanctioned, or approved, without implicating virtue; female secrecy is sanctioned, or penalised, impugning virtue. Whether driven by competition, lust, or political ambition, it is the males in this story who have the choice to surprise and deceive, with varying degrees of morality. Lucrece’s virtue, in contrast, is incompatible with secrecy.

<sup>7</sup> The impersonal passive voice (“it is observed”) is intentional here. Although Lucrece “calls to mind” the painting of Troy (l. 1366), her perspective does not explicitly emerge until dozens of lines later (from l. 1443). Neither does the ekphrastic description sound like the opinionated narrator of the poem at large. In this dazzling set piece, the author displays the full extent of his talents, and his fictionalised voice more than any other comes through. It is thus all the more interesting that within this passage, Patrick Cheney locates a highly significant representation of Shakespeare’s authorship, discussed briefly below (*Literary Authorship* 33).

### Promiscuous Parallels and Unjust Justice: Eighteenth-Century Responses

Although I have pursued the mainstream reading that upholds a virtuous Lucrece, historical responses to the poem are not as clear-cut as my discussion has suggested. In developing the idea of men's marble and women's waxen minds, the narrator goes so far as to deny women moral responsibility – “call them not the authors of their ill” (l. 1244) – and to claim complete knowledge of their guilt – “Poor women’s faces are their own faults’ books” (l. 1253). Irony lurks in these lines that ostensibly acquit women of wrong while insisting on “*their ill*,” and “*their own* faults’ books” (emphasis added). Moreover, “[p]oor women’s faces” sits and sounds uncomfortably close to “[p]oor women’s faults” (ll. 1253, 1258). These features, together with the contradictory assertion that women are not guilty and yet reveal their guilt, activate potentially ironic interpretations that belong to a misogynistic Western tradition that maligns women as duplicitous and promiscuous by nature.

It is thus possible to position the narrator’s ambivalent comments in a longstanding debate about the legend of Lucrece. The common approach assumed Lucrece’s transparency and innocence, but from the fifth century a subversive reading enabled by Augustine insisted on the unknowability of her will and the importance of her behaviour. Since Augustine considered suicide a form of self-punishment rather than self-preservation, he viewed Lucrece’s self-inflicted death as evidence of guilt rather than honour. “There is no possible way out,” Augustine lamented, “[i]f she is adulterous, why is she praised? If chaste, why was she put to death?” (qtd in Donaldson 29).<sup>8</sup>

Sasha Roberts traces both types of response to Shakespeare’s poem through the early modern period, drawing attention to a number of editorial changes that narrowed interpretive possibilities from the sixth edition of 1616, such as frequently italicised words as well as newly introduced chapter headings in a table of contents and in the margins of the poem. For Roberts, “[t]he accumulative effect of the textual variants and new editorial apparatus [...] is to construct a more polite and moralistic poem – and a less ideologically complex text – than originally appeared in 1594” (120). By re-presenting the material, and not merely summarising it, the editorial interventions “actively discouraged” more sceptical readings of the legend that viewed Lucrece as secretively promiscuous (120).

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<sup>8</sup> For the larger discussion, see Donaldson 21-39.

These editorial features were dropped in Shakespeare's poetic *Works* by Charles Gildon (1709), the author of the first extended critical remarks on the poems, and their most influential editor prior to Edmond Malone (1780, 1790). When preparing "Tarquin and Lucrece" (as it was then called)<sup>9</sup> for Shakespeare's poetic *Works* (1709), Gildon followed the text published two years earlier in *Poems on Affairs of State* (1707), which had removed most of the italics (Shakespeare, *A New Variorum* 413). Unlike the editor of *Poems on Affairs of State*, though, Gildon rejected the "very childish and superfluous" marginal headings ("Remarks" 456). By removing the apparatus, Gildon's edition – which became the base text for most editions up to Malone's time – arguably reopened the poem to more subversive and ironic approaches.

Two little or never explored eighteenth-century print publications offer opposing responses to the secretiveness or transparency of the female protagonist in Shakespeare's poem.<sup>10</sup> The first publication is the anonymous *A Second Part of a View of London and Westminster: Or, The Town Spy* (1725), which quotes but does not attribute fifty-five lines from *Lucrece*, from "O! OPPORTUNITY! thy Guilt is great" to "Not spend the Dowry of a Lawful Bed" (ll. 876-938, skipping l. 887 and ll. 911-17). The quotation functions as a response to the main feature of the volume, which is highlighted in small capitals in the description of contents on the title page: "An Exact and Correct List of the KEPT MISTRESSES, their Places of Abode, and the Names and Characters of their respective KEEPERs" (see Figure 1). The inclusion of *Lucrece* in such a volume, and its association with this list of keepers and mistresses, accommodates subversive readings that raise doubts about Lucrece's fidelity and virtue. To substantiate this argument, I first place Part Two of *The Town Spy* (1725) within its early eighteenth-century publishing context, and then turn to the deployment of *Lucrece* within Part Two.

<sup>9</sup> It seems that the editor Nicholas Rowe first employed this title in Shakespeare's dramatic *Works*, Vol. 1, xxxix. Thanks to Gildon's edition, which adopted Rowe's denomination, the poem was known as "Tarquin and Lucrece" during most of the eighteenth century.

<sup>10</sup> The oversight of these publications is a consequence of the longstanding scholarly consensus that "Shakespeare's non-dramatic poems were neglected and almost forgotten" in the late seventeenth and most of the eighteenth century (Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* xxiv). See also Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Poems* 519; Ritchie and Sabor 5; and Fairer 100. Depledge and Kirwan offer a different assessment, noting the "increasingly important role of the poems as a marketable part of Shakespeare's print output in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries" (5).

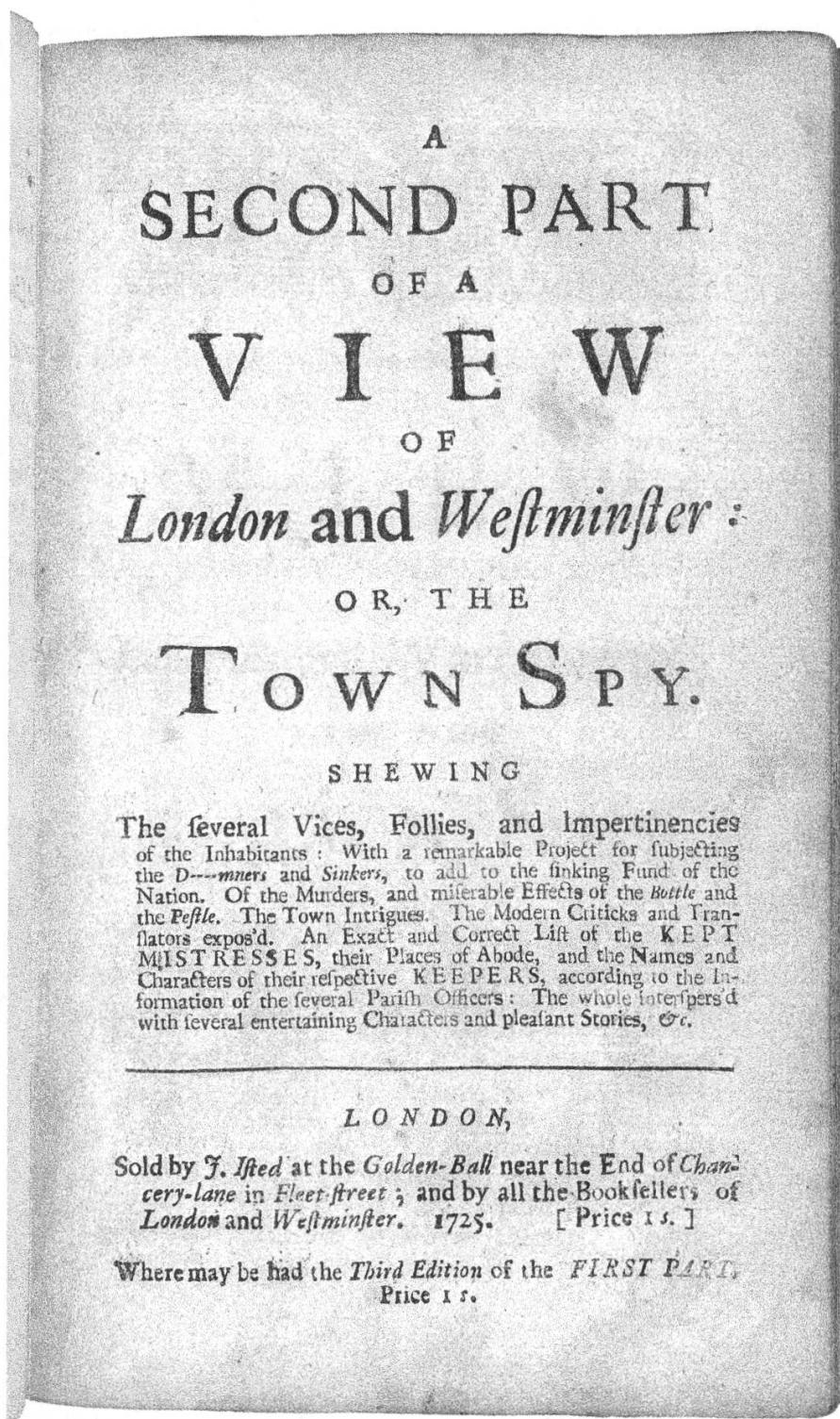


Figure 1. Title page of *A Second Part of A View of London and Westminster: Or, the Town Spy* (1725). Note the small capitals for “KEPT MISTRESSES” and “KEEPERS” in the contents description. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

Like many titles from the period, Part Two of *Town Spy* builds on the success of the influential *London Spy* by Ned Ward (1698-1700), a serial in eighteen parts published from November 1698 to May 1700 that was reprinted several times, notably as the first volume of Ward's *Miscellanies* in 1718.<sup>11</sup> The most immediate debt of Part Two of *Town Spy*, however, is to the initial *Town Spy*, published in 1725. Because the initial publication was considerably more successful than its continuation, one may assume that it prompted readers to seek out Part Two with a desire for more of the same.<sup>12</sup>

In the initial *Town Spy*, readers would have found a gossipy account of London's various parishes, usually general in nature, but with occasional specific pseudonymous references (e.g., Mrs. *Armfull* in *Grace-Church-street*, and Miss *Biddy* her Neighbour, *A View* 50). They also would have come across a misogynistic account of the increasing power of women, as demonstrated by their frivolous "Pin-money" (58), and a provocative quotation from Dryden's translation of Juvenal's sixth *Satire*. The quotation asks why one would choose to die by marriage in these times, when preferable deaths exist. "Is there no City Bridge from whence to leap?" Dryden's Juvenal asks as the volume concludes (60).

Part Two continues this social commentary with a narratorial voice that is difficult to pin down, sometimes moral censurer and judge, sometimes self-ridiculing and, more often, ridiculing others. For example, after a tedious discussion of the Ten Commandments, the narrator admits to having knowingly annoyed the reader, but states,

I take a particular Pleasure in *finding Fault*, especially with *Great Men*; it is my distinguishing Characteristick, and so essential to my very Nature, that (if I may be allowed a Witticism in this Place) I am always *out of Humour*, when I find my self *pleased*. (*A Second Part* 17-18)

<sup>11</sup> A number of titles were modelled upon *The London Spy*, including *Town Spy* (1704); Ward's own *The Wandering Spy: Or, the Merry Travellers* (1723); the short-lived journals *The Athenian Spy* (1720) and *The British Spy* (1725); and the pamphlet *The Country Spy* (1730?). There appears to be no relation between the two-part *Town Spy* of 1704 and the two-part *Town Spy* of 1725. Battestin is unusual in attributing both parts of *The Town Spy* (1725) to Ward himself, but offers no explanation (160 n. 52, 632 n. 264). For a bibliography of Ward's writings, see Appendix A in Troyer.

<sup>12</sup> The second part of the *Town Spy* had limited success in the book trade: it was published in 1725, and seems never to have reached a second edition. The initial *Town Spy*, in contrast, went through no fewer than four editions: three in 1725 (twice in London, once in Gloucester), and one in 1728 (London). The 1728 edition of "Part 1" (as it was labelled for the first time in select footers) was issued with the 1725 edition of Part Two.

On another occasion, he ironically praises thieving at length, but condescendingly forgoes a more sophisticated account because

I would avoid an Ostentation of Learning in this Place, or I could make my Reader stare at my profound Sagacity, in discussing the Tenets, and discovering the Thefts of the Ancients one from another; but familiar Examples, will be more suitable to the Genius and Capacity of several of my courteous Readers. (32-33)

This narrator is both irreverent and holier-than-thou, oblivious and smarter-than-thou. His is a complex voice that leaves no one unscathed – not even himself.

This misogyny and narratorial instability provide the context for the main event of Part Two, described by the narrator as “what I have long promis’d, and what has been impatiently expected from me: I mean an Account of the present State of fashionable *Fornication*, or as the Moderns have it, *Keeping*” (33). What follows is a pseudonymous list of 179 women, along with their locations and solicitors. At times the references are unashamedly suggestive and generic – “Miss *Sprightly*” by “Lord *Vigorous*,” and “Miss. *Tinder*” by “Col. *Strikefire*” (38, 42) – and at others specific and potentially revelatory, e.g., “Miss *High-game*, the Daughter of a Farmer in *Bedfordshire*” visited by “the Rev. Mr. *Stiff*, a *Nonjuring Clergyman*, notorious for writing *Libels* against the Government” (53).

Immediately after this risqué list, the narrator introduces the fifty-five-line passage from *Lucrece* (albeit without mention of Shakespeare or his collected poems):

As *Inclination* and *Necessity*, joined to *Opportunity* and *Time*, have no doubt been the prime and principal Causes of their Ruin. [sic] I shall therefore present these Ladies, with the Exclamation the violated *Lucrece* makes upon OPPORTUNITY and TIME, for contributing to her *undoing*. (54)

It might seem as though Lucrece’s lament trivialises the idea that these pseudonymous women in difficult economic circumstances were forced to exchange their services for maintenance. The “violated” Lucrece’s situation is true duress in comparison to that of these “Ladies,” for whom “*Inclination*” conveniently joins “*Necessity*” (54). Yet the comparison cuts both ways: even as they are contrasted with Lucrece, they are associated with her, so that Lucrece may be innocent and violated (in the language of the narrator), but also secretly promiscuous (like the women listed above her). It is noteworthy that the narrator uses the

same partial phrase for the kept mistresses ("Opportunity and Time") as he does for Lucrece ("OPPORTUNITY and TIME"), and that their "Ruin" parallels her "undoing." The explicit verbal similarities arguably overpower the implicit situational differences. The hermeneutic instability of the quotation, moreover, fits in well with the narrator's slippery tone throughout Part Two of *The Town Spy*, and the characterisation of these promiscuous ladies (and potentially Lucrece) aligns with the misogyny of the series more generally. The overall effect is to merge sexual violence with secretive and consensual sexual acts, all the while stoking suspicion of female promiscuity in Shakespeare's poem and in London neighbourhoods in the 1720s.

The second publication that invokes the issue of female secrecy in Shakespeare's *Lucrece* is a little-known stand-alone edition of the poem published in 1768, the first since 1655.<sup>13</sup> It is among a plethora of publications that responded to a contemporary rape scandal involving Frederick Calvert, Lord Baltimore, and Sarah Woodcock, a dissenting milliner.<sup>14</sup> According to Woodcock's testimony at the trial as recorded in shorthand by Joseph Gurney, Baltimore patronised her family's milliner shop sometime in December 1767.<sup>15</sup> His accomplice, Ann Harvey, later purchased items, mentioned a promising female customer, and requested that Woodcock call on her at home. Upon arrival the afternoon of 16 December, Woodcock was delayed for some time, and then taken to the supposed customer. In fact, it was the home of Baltimore in Southampton Row. Baltimore and his accomplices, including Harvey and Elizabeth Griffinburg, detained Woodcock for several days, and later transported her to his country home in Woodcote Park, Epsom, where he raped her. Eventually Woodcock's friends located her and intervened with a habeas corpus warrant, requiring that she be brought before the magistrate, Lord Mansfield. Even then, Woodcock did not immediately realise that she was free. Her abduction lasted thirteen days

<sup>13</sup> Seldom acknowledged, the 1768 edition is not included in a chart of eighteenth-century publications of Shakespeare's poems by Cheney in *National Poet-Playwright* 5-7, nor in an expansive overview of *Shakespeare in Print* by Murphy, nor in Shakespeare's *Critical Heritage* by Vickers. It is mentioned, however, by editors Wright and LaMar (Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Sonnets* xxv), and recorded by Forster 260.

<sup>14</sup> Williamson 129-34, esp. 132, examines the scandal and the debate in print, and mentions in passing *Modern Chastity*, which I discuss below. However, she does not touch on the 1768 publication of Shakespeare's poem.

<sup>15</sup> The following summary is largely based on Woodcock's harrowing testimony, including her shocking cross-examination by Baltimore, as recorded by Gurney for *The Trial of Frederick Calvert*, published in London, Edinburgh, and Dublin (1768).

(December 16-29). On Saturday, March 26th, 1768, at the Kingston assizes, Baltimore and his accomplices were tried and acquitted.

Publishers brought out a number of pamphlets to weigh in on the controversy, including Shakespeare's *Lucrece*, freshly titled *Tarquin and Lucrece, or, The Rape: A Poem*, on the model of *Modern Chastity: Or, the Agreeable Rape. A Poem. By a Young Gentleman of Sixteen. In Vindication of The Right Hon. Lord B—E.* (1768).<sup>16</sup> The two poems represent opposing positions on the issue of female secrecy and virtue: *Tarquin and Lucrece* stands in for the virtuous and violated female; *Modern Chastity: Or, the Agreeable Rape* presents the secretive female who feigns refusal but indulges gladly. They were reviewed side by side (items 34 and 36) in *The Critical Review*, where *Modern Chastity* was vigorously criticised, and *Tarquin and Lucrece* described as follows:

*Tarquin and Lucrece, or, the Rape: A Poem. 8vo. Pr. 1 s. Nicoll.*

This piece was written by Shakespeare, and is published among his miscellaneous poems. It is a work of no extraordinary merit; and would never have appeared in its present form, if a *rape* had not been lately the subject of conversation. The editor impertinently offers it to the perusal of lord B. (228)

Naming Shakespeare as the author of this anonymous publication, the reviewer stresses the poem's inferior quality but recognises its timeliness.<sup>17</sup>

The Folger Shakespeare Library possesses the sole surviving copy of this octavo publication (see Figure 2), unavailable on microfilm or *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Its title page epigraph is extracted from the end of the poem, when Lucrece relates to Collatine and others what has happened:

Mine enemy was strong, my poor self weak,  
(And far the weaker with so strong a fear)  
My bloody judge forbad my tongue to speak:  
No rightful plea might plead for justice there:  
His scarlet lust came evidence to swear,

5

<sup>16</sup> The annotator of the ECCO (*Eighteenth Century Collections Online*) copy of *Modern Chastity* has filled in the blank with Baltimore's name, and written, "undoubtedly, By the well known Rev<sup>d</sup>. Bennet Allen," a Church of England clergyman and journalist (c. 1736-1819). Allen's authorship of the poem is unlikely, according to his biographer C. S. L. Davies.

<sup>17</sup> The 1768 publication is also listed in "A Catalogue of New Books" in *The Scots Magazine* (152), where it is likewise attributed to Shakespeare.

That my poor beauty had purloin'd his eyes;  
And when the judge is rob'd the prisoner dies.

This speech is part of Lucrece's own trial scene of sorts, in which she reveals information that she deliberately delivered to her husband and others in person rather than by letter, so that she might be better believed in her distress, and not suspected of complicity.<sup>18</sup> The epigraph conjures a twisted metaphorical court: an unjust judge silenced her, and so it was impossible to plead for justice (ll. 3-4). Personified scarlet lust – both victim and witness – claimed that her beauty stole his eyes (ll. 5-6). (The now obsolete usage of “evidence” here means “a witness,” *OED* 5a.) The portrayal of Tarquin as judge, victim, and witness comes together in the final line: “And when the judge is rob'd the prisoner dies” (l. 7). It is unclear whether the final line reports the pronouncement of personified “scarlet lust,” or represents Lucrece’s assessment of the mock metaphorical trial. In any case, in completing the rhyme, stanza, and sentence, Lucrece demonstrates rhetorically what she conveys semantically: she has been fatally locked in, a “prisoner” of the victim-witness-judge. The judicial imagery and context of this epigraph is all the more poignant given the actual trial involving Woodcock and Baltimore.

Another feature of this publication is the dedication to Baltimore: “To the Right Honourable Lord Baltimore, This Poem of Tarquin and Lucrece, Is Humbly Offered to Your Lordship's Perusal, by Your Most Obedient Servant, The Editor” (see Figure 3). The sarcasm is noted in *The Critical Review*, quoted above. It would seem that the editor of the 1768 publication invites Baltimore to recognise himself in the character of Tarquin, and to recognise Woodcock in the character of Lucrece. A couple of traditional commonplace markers reinforce these identifications. Since the first edition in 1594, lines 87-88, “For unstained thoughts do seldom dream on evil, / Birds never limed no secret bushes fear,” had been regularly set off with quotation marks to signal their special status as *sententiae*.<sup>19</sup> The habit of marking lines 181-82, “As from this cold flint I enforced this fire, / So Lucrece must I force to my desire,” emerged in the eighteenth century with *Poems on Affairs of State*

<sup>18</sup> The epigraph of the 1768 publication covers lines 1646-52. An earlier passage in *Lucrece* disturbingly relates that Lucrece “hoards” her sighs, groans, and tears in order to “spend” them while recounting the rape to Collatine, “the better so to clear her / From that suspicion which the world might bear her” (ll. 1314-30, esp. 1318, 1320-21).

<sup>19</sup> For a list of all the passages marked as *sententiae* in the first edition, see Shakespeare, *Oxford* 248n.

(1707) and Gildon's version of *Tarquin and Lucrece* in Shakespeare's poetic *Works* (1709). The 1768 edition follows this eighteenth-century tradition by marking these two passages, but with arguably new implications that associated Woodcock with Lucrece's naïveté, and Baltimore with Tarquin's lust.

Unlike Part Two of *The Town Spy* in 1725, the 1768 publication appropriates Shakespeare's *Lucrece* to intervene on behalf of a clear perpetrator and victim, Baltimore and Woodcock, respectively. *The Town Spy* underscores female secrecy and promiscuity among women and in *Lucrece* by listing secret liaisons and veiling identities under pseudonyms; the stand-alone edition of 1768 aligns two women, one fictional and the other real-life, who dared to reveal a rape and who were consequently slandered as secretly promiscuous. The virtue or secret promiscuity of real-life eighteenth-century women lie at the heart of these divergent appropriations of *Lucrece*.

### Revealing Shakespeare

From the perspectives of the characters and the narrator, and of eighteenth-century respondents, Lucrece may thus be either transparent and virtuous, or duplicitous and promiscuous. These polarised responses contrast with the secrecy enjoyed, used, and misused by men throughout the poem. The difference between Lucrece and her male counterparts momentarily dissolves, however, in a passage near the start of the poem which arguably implicates Shakespeare himself. A distinct narratorial voice – one with little or no resemblance to the commentator on “marble” and “waxen” minds – radically merges moral, literary, and gendered boundaries. This voice brings together Tarquin and Lucrece, Shakespeare and us, and thereby honours individual moral complexity, with varying degrees of secrecy and transparency, regardless of gender.

Implicating Shakespeare himself is not quite the same thing as identifying where he stands – Shakespeare's own views on any given issue are notoriously difficult to recover. One way that scholars have attempted to access them is to address the narrower question of his understanding of his own authorship. Patrick Cheney, for example, has argued for

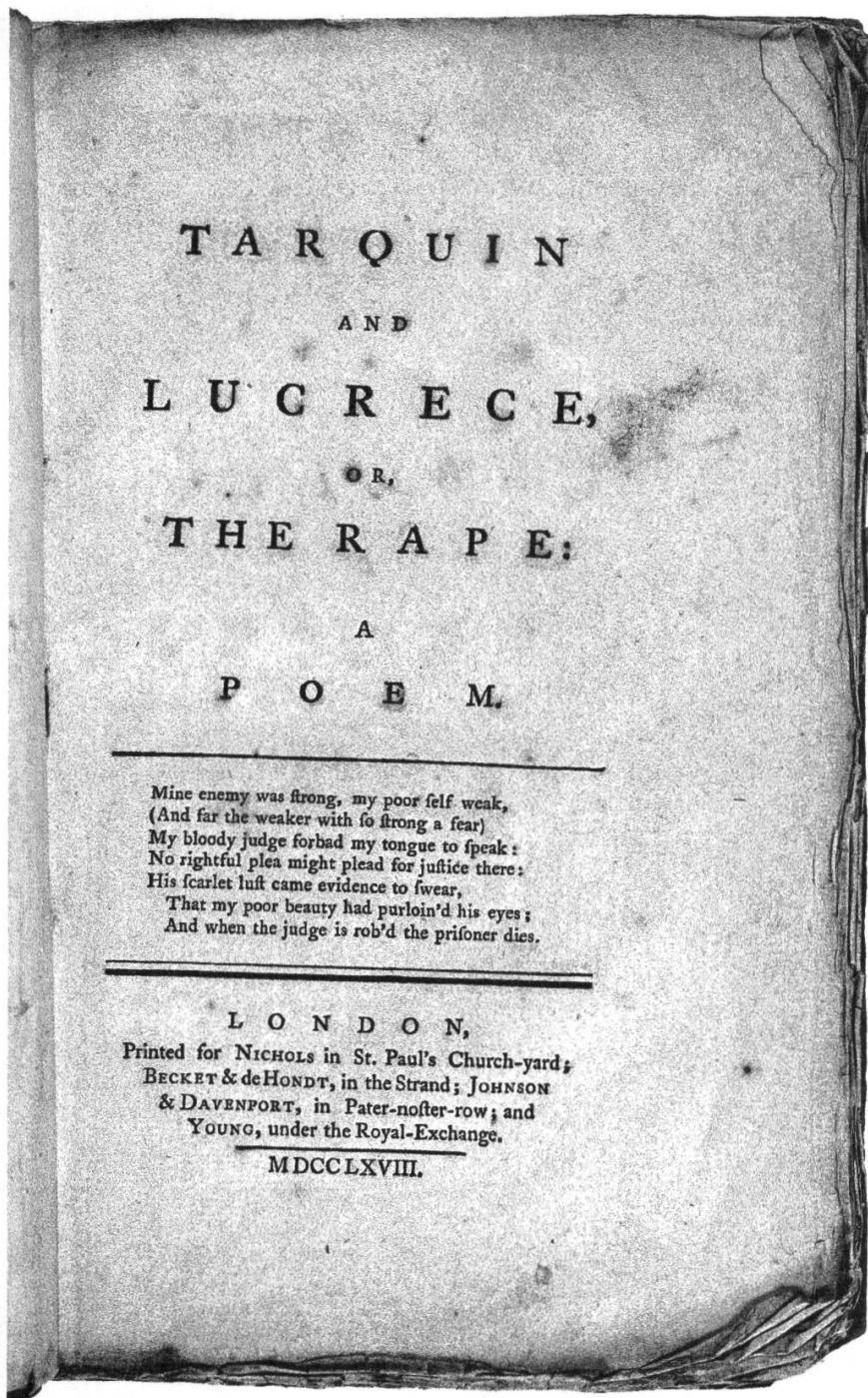


Figure 2. Title page of *Tarquin and Lucrece, or, The Rape: A Poem* (1768). The Folger Shakespeare Library possesses the sole surviving copy, according to the records of the *ESTC*. Used by permission.

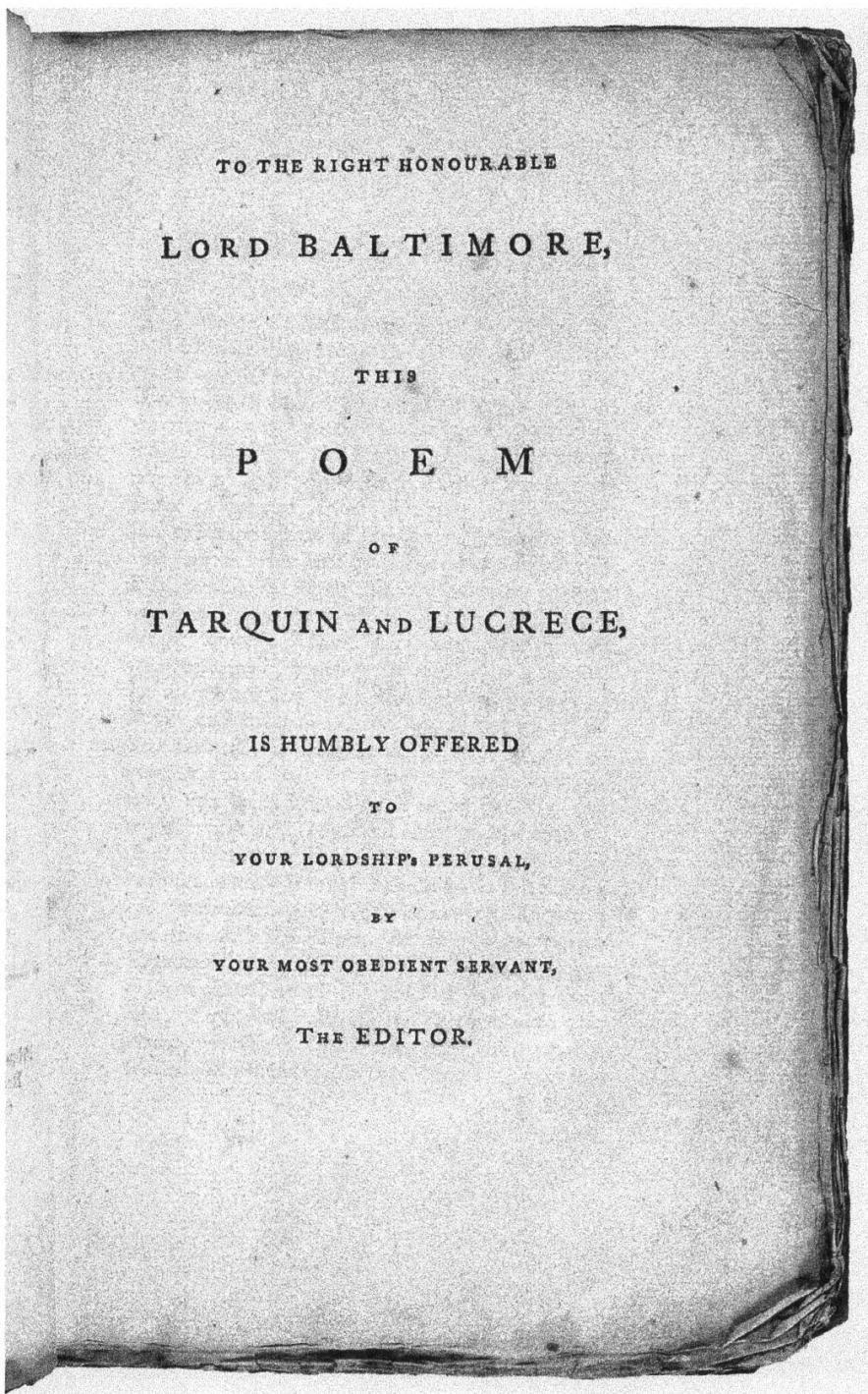


Figure 3. Dedication of *Tarquin and Lucrece, or, The Rape: A Poem* (1768). The editor “humbly” offers the poem to Lord Baltimore, who was accused of rape at the time of publication. The sarcasm is noted in *The Critical Review*. Used by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

a fiction of authorship activated by figural, intertextual relationships within Shakespeare's works. *Lucrece*'s ekphrastic description of the painting of the Fall of Troy contains a figural representation of Achilles: "That for Achilles' image stood his spear, / Gripped in an armèd hand, himself behind / Was left unseen, save to the eye of mind" (ll. 1424-26). According to Cheney, this metonymy is "the most formalized representation of self-concealing, counter-laureate authorship in the Shakespeare canon" (*Literary Authorship* 33).<sup>20</sup> Amy Greenstadt also identifies a distinct form of authorship in *Lucrece*, in which the female protagonist represents a powerful authorial figure who contributes to a Shakespearean fantasy of authorship capable of conditioning the ultimate meaning of a work ("Read it in me").

By means of the internal ruminations of the two main characters, it seems to me that *Lucrece* reveals Shakespeare in another way, not so much his views but his humanity. Unlike his potential sources (e.g., Ovid, Livy, Gower, Chaucer, and others), Shakespeare gave exceptional emphasis to the internal reflections of Tarquin leading up to the rape, and of Lucrece after it. According to Ian Donaldson,

No other version of the Lucretia story explores more minutely or with greater psychological insight the mental processes of the two major characters, their inconsistent wavering to and fro, before they bring themselves finally and reluctantly to action. (44)

Shakespeare's extraordinary attention to their reflections suggests heightened authorial import.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, there is a moment during Tarquin's ruminations when a distinct narratorial voice emerges to envelop fictional and non-fictional, male and female, and even Shakespeare himself, potentially offering real insight into the author.

Early on in the poem, Tarquin is lying in bed mulling over what he is about to do when the plot pauses for a reflection on human nature. This three-stanza break from the narrative discusses why Tarquin – and more precisely, why we – might knowingly do something wrong. Here is the passage in question, with a stanza before and after for context, and with added italics to highlight the shifts in pronouns:

<sup>20</sup> For Cheney, Shakespeare's self-concealing, counter-laureate authorship means eschewing the model of poet laureate charted by Virgil and followed by Spenser, and concealing intertextual fictions about poetry and drama within the works.

<sup>21</sup> See also Shakespeare, *Oxford*, note to lines 127-441 (250n.).

- As one of which<sup>22</sup> doth *Tarquin* lie revolving  
 The sundry dangers of *his* will's obtaining;  
 Yet ever to obtain *his* will resolving.  
 Though weak-built hopes persuade *him* to abstaining, 130  
 Despair to gain doth traffic oft for gaining,  
 And when great treasure is the meed proposèd,  
 Though death be adjunct, there's no death supposed.
- Those* that much covet are with gain so fond  
 For what *they* have not – that which *they* possess – 135  
*They* scatter and unloose it from their bond,  
 And so by hoping more *they* have but less,  
 Or gaining more, the profit of excess  
 Is but to surfeit, and such griefs sustain,  
 That *they* prove bankrupt in this poor-rich gain. 140
- The aim of *all* is but to nurse the life  
 With honour, wealth, and ease in waning age;  
 And in this aim there is such thwarting strife  
 That one for all, or all for one *we* gage –  
 As life for honour in fell battle's rage, 145  
 Honour for wealth, and oft that wealth doth cost  
 The death of *all*, and altogether lost.
- So that, in vent'ring ill, *we* leave to be  
 The things *we* are for that which *we* expect;  
 And this ambitious foul infirmity, 150  
 In having much, torments *us* with defect  
 Of that *we* have; so then *we* do neglect  
 The thing *we* have, and, all for want of wit,  
 Make something nothing, by augmenting it.
- Such hazard now must doting *Tarquin* make, 155  
 Pawning *his* honour to obtain *his* lust,  
 And for *himself himself* he must forsake.  
 Then where is truth if there be no self-trust?  
 When shall *he* think to find a stranger just,  
 When *he himself himself* confounds, betrays 160  
 To sland'rous tongues and wretched hateful days?

There is a progressive development across the middle stanzas of this selection, from the plural gender-neutral pronouns *those* and *they* (ll. 134-40), to the inclusive *all* that drifts into *we* (ll. 141-47), and finally the

<sup>22</sup> I.e., as one of the sleepless “troubled minds” mentioned in the previous line (l. 126).

insistent *we* and *us* (ll. 148-54).<sup>23</sup> This three-stanza unit is offset by comments before and after that refer reiteratively to Tarquin.

Although the change in pronouns often goes unremarked by editors, some scholars have recognised the exceptional status of this passage in its poetic context.<sup>24</sup> Catherine Belsey, for example, does not specifically highlight the unusual reiterated first-person-plural pronoun ("we"), but nonetheless conveys the peculiar status of one of the stanzas (ll. 148-54) by introducing it with the phrase "the poem observes," instead of, for instance, "the narrator observes" (323-24). Similarly, she does not explicitly remark on the impersonal plural pronouns ("Those," "they"), but does implicitly build on them to argue that the stanza on covetousness (ll. 134-40) might implicate both Tarquin and Collatine (319-20). In addition, Jonathan Hart alludes to lines 126-33 when suggesting that the restlessness of Tarquin and the potential wordplay on "will" may refer to "authorial W/will – sexual desire and volition as much as Tarquin's struggle with his will," and he comments that lines 153-54 describe "a lack through surfeit in Tarquin and perhaps in the narrator and reader" (67). Finally, T. W. Baldwin discusses how Shakspere "takes time out for four stanzas [lines 134-61] to point the moral," which serves as "a perfect illustration of Erasmian *ratiocinatio* as Shakspere had learned it in grammar school" (117).

Above I discussed the narrator's very pointed – and polemical – comments on female impressionability, moral responsibility, and transparency. The present narratorial voice is different: rather than hardening gender divisions, it radically breaks down moral, literary, and gendered boundaries. I would go further than Belsey and Hart, who respectively applied a stanza to Tarquin and Collatine (ll. 134-40), and a couplet to Tarquin, the narrator, and the reader (ll. 153-54). I would argue instead that the entire passage assimilates Tarquin and Collatine, readers and Lucrece, and the author himself in a discussion of human nature and our competing inner interests. Baldwin intuits that Shakespeare himself is located somewhere in this passage ("Shakspere [...] takes time out"); I suggest that his voice and humanity merge with our own.

Across these three stanzas, gender is not related to innocence or guilt. Misdeeds result instead from competing interests within the individual, and the tyranny of one of those interests over others. All are

<sup>23</sup> In passing, I note that there are several *alls* in lines 141-47. I have highlighted the two that potentially refer to *all* people.

<sup>24</sup> The editions by Burrow, Roe, and Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen make no note of the change of pronouns in this passage, nor of the distinct narratorial voice.

susceptible – or, in the words of the narrator, “we” are susceptible – to such imbalances. As conflicting as it might be to have Tarquin assimilated to Lucrece or ourselves, this stance disassociates guilt and innocence from any seemingly intrinsic quality like transparency or naïveté or gender. It makes an alternative narrative possible, one in which Lucrece does not have to be the utterly transparent and virtuous matron-of-matrons in order to be the unambiguous victim of rape. In the alternative narrative she can, like the men in the poem or the readers outside it, be a morally complex character; her secrets do not by definition compromise her virtue.

Buried within the poem but not explored at large, this idea subtly subverts the historical tendency to construct morally simplistic females, either utterly virtuous and transparent, or devilishly crafty and duplicitous. Shakespeare’s *Lucrece* reconstructs and reflects this oversimplified construction back at us, even as this distinct narrator reminds us of our own moral complexity. Within this polarising tradition of women and secrets, Shakespeare inserts a brief but broad commentary on human nature, indiscriminately endowing readers and author alike with moral complexity, regardless of gender.

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