PART ONE

Humanism and Antihumanism
Like many another Elizabethan, William Shakespeare presumably first heard the slogan *nosce teipsum*, "know thyself," which he was to hear many times afterward, in the grammar school of Stratford-on-Avon. He may have been told to memorize it together with other *sententiae* in one of the anthologies used in Elizabethan schools, such as *Sententiae Pueriles* or *Disticha Catonis*. In the latter collection, it appeared among the sayings of the seven wise men of Greece and was attributed, as traditionally, to Chilon, the Lacedaemonian. Whether already at this point or later, Shakespeare must have been told something about the meaning of self-knowledge. He would thus have learned that *nosce teipsum* was inscribed on the entrance to the temple of Apollo at Delphi. He may have been shown the composite emblem of the seven wise men, in which *nosce teipsum* was illustrated by a mirror. In any case, he would have met the phrase in such Latin authors as Ovid, Persius, and Cicero, and his schoolmaster would then very likely have taken the opportunity to instruct him on its significance and application.

Such explanation would have been an introduction to the Christian humanists’ philosophy of man. The reference books that a schoolmaster had at his disposal were compiled by them and conveyed their views. Erasmus’s *Adagia* was here a very obvious choice. It contained the traditional remarks on the origin of the saying, defined it as an advice for humility and moderation, and supplied various other definitions and explanations from classical and Christian writers. Several of these stressed the difficulty of knowing oneself, the obligation to improve oneself, and the need to observe others in order to understand oneself.

Erasmus was more explicit on these matters in his *Enchiridion Militis Christiani* (1502), a book that was still very influential up to
and during the time Shakespeare went to grammar school. The English Reformers had liked its insistence on purity of faith and its attacks on ceremonies. A translation ascribed to William Tyndale went through nine editions between 1533 and 1576, and Miles Coverdale made an abridged version in 1545. If there were no further English editions after 1576, the reason was surely that the Erasmian arguments had become common property in moral and religious thought.

The metaphor that unifies and illuminates Erasmus’s *Enchiridion* is that of life as warfare, a metaphor that was familiar to medieval and Renaissance Christians through Job 7:1 in the military terminology of the Vulgate: “Militia est hominis vita super terram.” For Erasmus, this warfare was primarily man’s struggle against internal enemies, the disturbing and destructive passions, which, leagued with the temptations of the world, led man to vice and sin. To conquer his archenemies, the flesh and the devil, man must know himself; this, Erasmus said, was the first point of wisdom. The ancients believed that the injunction *nosce teipsum* came from heaven; but the saying also agreed with Christian religion, since the mystical lover in the Song of Solomon asked his bride to leave the house (i.e., the Church) unless she understood herself: “O, thou beautiful among all women, if thou know not thyself, go out of doors, and walk after the steps of thy flock and sort.”

The derivation of the injunction for self-knowledge from both pagan literature and the Bible was characteristic of Erasmus’s *philosophia Christi*. Although his *Enchiridion* had a more specifically religious purpose than the works he composed for school use, it too attempted to balance Socrates and Christ, earth and heaven, mind and spirit. Erasmus struck a similar balance when he spoke of the self, which, for him, was both good and bad, reasonable and passionate, divinely inspired and humanly corrupted. The problem of self-knowledge was to reconcile the warring elements in man; outer and inner man, body and soul, flesh and spirit, passion and reason must be given their due, and all must serve Christ. What was against nature was as bad as what was against God. Faith alone was not a guarantee of salvation; self-discipline and self-control also must be used.

Sometimes, it is true, Erasmus spoke of the self as if it were the enemy. He demanded conquering oneself, getting out of oneself, and
losing oneself. But, as the context shows, he meant here only the baser parts of the self, the flesh and the passions, and he did not really think that these could or should be completely suppressed. The passions were not to be eradicated, Stoic fashion; they must be tempered in the way Aristotle and the Fathers recommended by using the better emotions for ennobling life and by controlling the baser ones. The man who knows himself is temperate.

Erasmus saw the self as having a reassuring organic and hierarchical structure. He adopted the Platonic analogy of man to a monarchy, with reason enthroned in the head; the higher passions, such as love and shamefulness, located beneath it in the chest; the destructive ones, such as lust and ambition, exiled below the diaphragm. The ethical health of man depended on the preservation of this order; a revolt of the lower forces meant passion, vice, and sin, and threatened the immortal substance of the soul. To combat this danger, man must use his reason according to God’s instruction. But he must not fall prey to the allurement of this faculty; he must remain conscious of his human limitations. With a touch of contemptus mundi, Erasmus recalled the misery of man’s entrance into life, the precariousness of his existence, and the certainty of his death.

Erasmus and the Christian humanists gave nosce teipsum an active meaning; the injunction not only implied an assessment of the human condition but also constituted an exhortation to a morally oriented life. And they were optimistic about translating this meaning into pedagogy; they put great faith in the efficacy of morality couched in grammatical and rhetorical instruction. In his programmatic tract De Ratione Studii, Erasmus demanded that the schoolboy should learn verba in order to acquire, even if not immediately, res, that is, concepts and ideas. The school curricula were planned so as to make the boys assimilate the ideas that the humanists considered right, that is, conforming to their moral outlook, and to enable them to express these according to formal principles derived from the ancients.

An Elizabethan schoolboy like William Shakespeare thus was exposed to a great deal of moral advice of the nosce teipsum kind. Even before reaching grammar school, he was likely to have memorized some verses on manners and morals, such as those which constituted Francis Seager’s The School of Virtue (1557, several times reprinted). It included the following admonition:
Let reason thee rule and not will thee lead
To follow thy fancy a wrong trace to tread.
But subdue thy lust and conquer thy will
If it move thee to do that is ill.\(^3\)

And the schoolboy's Catechism and Psalter gave similar advice; it warned him to bridle "the inward affections" of his heart and thus enjoined the temperance that the Christian humanists thought central to self-control and self-knowledge. His little grammar, the Erasmus-Colet-Lily collaboration, probably was prefixed by some English moral sentences like the "Precepts of Living," which enjoined subduing his appetites, thrusting down pride, and refraining from wrath, and it contained similar instructions in its illustrative Latin sentences.\(^4\) And the schoolboy was inundated with such material in the Latin phrase books for parsing and memorization: "cognosce teipsum . . . iracundiam tempera . . . ne cui invidies . . . invidia suum torquet auctorem . . . ingratitudo viciorum caput . . . perturbato corde nihil jucundum . . . gravior inimicus qui latet sub pectore . . . teipsum ne negligas . . . vive memor mortis." \(^5\) One understands the sententiousness and the morality of the Elizabethans better when he sits down with them, for a while, on a school bench.

Erasmus himself devoted a considerable part of his Herculean labors to making it easier for the schoolboy to learn both Latin and self-knowledge. Many of the sentences, figures, parables, and aphorisms in his De Copia Verborum ac Rerum, De Conscribendis Epistolis, and Parabolae Sive Similia served clearly this dual purpose. In two of the dialogues of his Colloquia, "Puerpera" and "Convivium Religiosum," he provided for the children's need to understand the body-soul relationship fundamental to their self-knowledge by weaving into the conversation a list of appropriate metaphors: the body was the vessel, the garment, the house, the instrument, the tabernacle, the grave, the prison, the inn, and the fortress of the soul. By these metaphors, the boy was taught the soul's integrity, preciousness, purity, and immortality as well as the body's frailty, impermanence, impurity, and burdensomeness. Shakespeare, like the other Elizabethan poets, never forgot the lesson; he used all the metaphors on Erasmus's list and similar ones; he knew how to express moral ideas in the way the Christian humanists thought they should be expressed—only, of course, he did so in the vernacular
rather than in Latin. But, directly or indirectly, he was indebted to Erasmus for formulating basic moral ideas of self-knowledge as the knowledge of body and soul.

Many of Shakespeare's fundamental patterns of self-knowledge must have derived ultimately from what he learned in grammar school. One needs to take in hand some of the annotated Renaissance editions of the classics to understand how the Christian humanists introduced moral ideas aimed at teaching self-knowledge into their commentaries. The injunction *nosce teipsum* appeared only occasionally in these notes, but the precepts that were thought implied in it were numerous. The variorum editions of Terence with their full commentaries offer some of the best examples of the method. The plays were examined not only for the author's language and the comic types portrayed but also for the psychological and moral instruction they were assumed to convey. A notable humanistic commentator, Jodocus Willichius, thus observed in minute detail Terence's depiction of the passions with some regard for their place in the play's structure but primarily from a physician's, rhetorician's, and moralist's point of view. In analyzing Geta's outbreak of anger in *Adelphoe*, III.ii, he claimed, for instance, that physicians could use this example to teach the causes, symptoms, reasons, and results of anger as a passion. The claim and the method remind one of modern psychologists and psychiatrists who would use Shakespeare's plays as textbooks of their science; like these, Willichius read much into the text that it does not imply. But what some humanists like Willichius were reading into Terence reached Elizabethan schoolboys as certainly as what some Freudians have read into Shakespeare is reaching the modern student. Even Montaigne, emancipated as he was from the Christian humanists' preceptorial methods of teaching self-knowledge, allowed their claims for Terence, judging him "wonderful conceited and apt lively to represent the motions and the passions of the mind and the condition of our manners; our actions make me often remember him."

With a method similar to that applied to Terence, other ancient authors were made to demonstrate the advantages of self-knowledge and the consequences of its lack: Virgil, whose Aeneas furnished a model of manhood; Horace, whose odes were called "medicinal" by his Elizabethan translator, Thomas Drant; and Ovid, whose *Metamorphoses* was recommended to the reader by its translator, Arthur Golding, as "a mirror for thyself thine own estate to see."
Two other authors deserve special attention here, the neo-Latin Palingenius and the classical Cicero; they needed no humanistic commentaries to make them into *nosce teipsum* authors, and they were more influential than any of the others in forming Elizabethan notions of self-knowledge.

Palingenius's didactic poem *Zodiacus Vitae* (ca. 1531) had what seems to us an inordinate place in the curricula, where it appeared almost universally as a text in the lower forms of grammar school, hardly because of its questionable aesthetic quality, but because it poeticized a Christian-humanist philosophy of life and helped to immunize the student against whatever paganism he might be exposed to elsewhere. Besides, the book conveyed some information on mythology, natural philosophy, and astrology, all made subservient to a theologically tinged philosophy of man. In his Seventh Book, "Libra," Palingenius specifically expounded the meaning of *nosce teipsum*. As he explained, self-knowledge must be combined with a search for the knowledge of God. Man must consider the nature of the Creator before examining His creation, man. So prepared, he will understand why God created man of two substances, body and soul, the one mortal, the other immortal. Just as his reason will show him that God is eternal, it will prove that the soul does not die. It follows that the soul must rule the body and the passions that tend to ally themselves with it. Self-knowledge makes man capable of controlling these by reason, God's grace assisting.

Thus Palingenius went over the same ground as did Sir John Davies in *Nosce Teipsum* (1599), with which students of Elizabethan literature are likely to be more familiar. Yet *Zodiacus Vitae*, which received an unattractive English translation by Barnabe Googe (1565), was a seminal book in Shakespeare's time, certainly one of Shakespeare's sources and, I suspect, one of Davies's.

Palingenius prepared the Elizabethan schoolboy for the moral philosophy of Cicero, to which he would be exposed in upper grammar school. Cicero's eminence in the curricula, as well as his general esteem as a philosopher in the Renaissance, stemmed from the rhetorical rotundity and the religious emphasis of his eclectic ethics. In Cicero, Petrarch had read long before much of what he thought and felt, and the Christian humanists continued to find the Roman philosopher and orator most like themselves among the pagan writers. Cicero's divine felicity of speech, Erasmus said in his Preface to *Tusculan Disputations*, came from the sanctity of an erudite heart.
Renaissance commentators, such as Georgius Valla, Joachimus Camerarius, and Philippus Beroaldus, brought their learning and bias to bear on Cicero’s text, thus constructing an eclectic humanistic moral philosophy by explaining Cicero in Platonic, Aristotelian, and, in particular, Christian theological terms. Some of this lore was likely to have reached the schoolboy William Shakespeare; if so, it helped to make him aware of what the humanists considered the “right” ideas of Cicero, but it would not have given him a feeling of the scope and variety of ancient philosophy.

Of Cicero’s moral philosophy, the works most widely used in the schools were *De Officiis* and four small tracts, *De Amicitia, De Senectute, Paradoxa, and Somnium Scipionis* (from the sixth book of *De Republica*), all of which were often printed together in an octavo edition. Of Cicero’s other philosophical works, the one most favored in the schools was *Tusculan Disputations*. Shakespeare could also read these books in English; they had been translated long before he went to London. *De Officiis* was rendered by Robert Whittington in 1534 and again, much better, by Nicholas Grimald in 1553. Grimald’s version, accompanied by his remarkable Preface, which stresses Cicero’s value for attaining self-knowledge, was reprinted a number of times before 1600. John Dolman issued a translation of *Tusculan Disputations* in 1561, and in 1577 Thomas Newton added the small treatises in the octavo volume, that is, *De Amicitia, De Senectute, Paradoxa, and Somnium Scipionis*, under the title of *Four Several Treatises*. Newton, incidentally, is a witness to the humanists’ scholarly versatility arising from a concern with self-knowledge; a divine, physician, and poet, he translated several theological and medical tracts, two of them of the *nosce teipsum* kind (Levinus Lemnius’s *The Touchstone of Complexions* [1565] and Philip de Mornay’s *The True Trial and Examination of a Man’s Own Self* [1586]), and edited the influential translation of Seneca’s ten tragedies (1581), contributing to it his own version of *Thebais*.

Both *Tusculan Disputations* and *Somnium Scipionis* contained definitions of self-knowledge influenced by Plato, who equated it with an understanding of the nature of the mind or soul. In *Tusculan Disputations* (1.52), Cicero said that to know oneself meant to know one’s soul; in *Somnium Scipionis*, he put it more emphatically (I quote Newton’s translation): “Neither art thou that which thy outward form and shape declareth; but the mind and soul of every
man is he, and not that figure and shape which may be pointed and showed with the finger.” Newton’s marginal gloss put it succinctly: “A man is his mind.” This equation could be brought into harmony with Christian theology, particularly with Paul’s insistence on the hegemony of the spirit over the flesh. As Bullinger asserted in his sermon “Of the Reasonable Soul of Man,” “Anima, the soul, is taken in the Scripture for the thing itself that hath life, yea, even for any, or rather for the whole, man.” William Shakespeare had good precedent in identifying man with his mind or soul, as he did repeatedly, often in order to underline man’s special claim to perfection: ideal men were for him “dear,” “noble,” “true,” and “strong” minds or souls. In this sense, mind and soul were synonymous with “self,” for which he used such epithets as “dear,” “noble,” “great,” “high,” “precious,” and “worthiest.”

But both Tusculan Disputations and Somnium Scipionis gave self-knowledge a meaning that transcended the individual soul. Tusculan Disputations interpreted the injunction of Apollo as including the soul’s contemplation of the divine essence: man mediates on the world order and realizes that the psychic substance is part of the deity. Thus he can solve the problem posed by his destructive emotions, cleanse himself of them, and acquire tranquillity and happiness. Cicero’s First Book, which borrowed from Plato, gave instructions for overcoming the fear of death; the remaining four books, heavily indebted to the Stoics, presented rules on how to conquer pain, distress, and other passions and to achieve the happy life of a virtuous man. Tusculan Disputations was influential in establishing control of the emotions as a priority for self-knowledge. In Somnium Scipionis, Cicero extended nosce teipsum to the political sphere by asking the statesman to strive for immortality through glorious service to the state. Drawn into a Christian context, this demand appealed to the Elizabethan moralists, who bid the prince or magistrate realize that to know himself meant bringing his exercise of power in line with the divine plan.

But it was Cicero’s description of the humanitas ideal in De Officiis that became most influential. Whenever man’s place in the creation and his duties were invoked in the Renaissance, there was likely to be an echo of Cicero. Thus, when Hamlet asks the question “What is a man, / If the chief good and market of his time / Be but to sleep and feed?” (I.iv.33 ff.), he reflects, as has long ago been noted, a key passage from the beginning of De Officiis (I.11). The resemblance,
I believe, becomes much closer when Hamlet’s argument is compared to that in sixteenth-century editions of De Officiis with the headings, marginal notes, and commentaries supplied by humanist commentators. (See Appendix A.) As I have shown elsewhere, the debate in the Trojan camp in Troilus and Cressida (II.ii) also uses arguments from De Officiis when it touches on man’s moral role in society and the universe.  

Cicero, following Plato, saw all moral action falling under the four cardinal virtues of justice, prudence, fortitude, and temperance. Of these, temperance was most closely associated with self-knowledge. Temperantia was a comprehensive virtue which, according to De Officiis, included verecundia, modestia, sedatia perturbationum, and decorum. The Renaissance commentators noted that in De Inventione (II.53–54), Cicero called continentia, elemetnia, and modestia qualities of temperantia, and they added the testimony of other philosophers and of Christian writers to Cicero’s on the meaning of temperance. In this fashion, Cicero’s discussion was supplemented with Aristotle’s doctrine of virtue as the temperate mean between excess and defect, with the Stoics’ warnings against all passions, with Saint Paul’s demand for sobriety in word and deed, with the rhetoricians’ notions of the moderation and control of the passions in speech, and with the physicians’ analysis of temperance as the right mixture of the humors.

This conglomeration of elements tended to make temperance a composite and an almost chaotic concept. We need to think of the Renaissance idea of temperance as a cluster of vaguely related virtues, most of them more positive than what we have in mind when we use the term. It included not only the suppression of the appetites, particularly of desire and lust, but also the active use of reason in leading an orderly life; it encompassed the health of man in his entirety, body and soul. Intemperance thus meant all violations of virtue through the submission of reason to the lower forces of the soul and any disorder of body and mind; it was equivalent to lack of self-knowledge, and the moralists and theologians saw in it a threat to the God-given order of the universe.

In Cicero’s discussion of temperantia, the commentators and thus the writers of moral tracts after them were particularly attracted to the concept of decorum. The term also played a considerable role in dramatic criticism, where it meant something rather different: the behavior of a character in conformity with the type, age, and charac-
teristics of the person portrayed.\textsuperscript{15} But in De Officiis (I.93–151), Cicero expounded a theory of moral decorum, proper ethical behavior. Of this, he distinguished two major kinds, decorum generale and speciale. The decorum generale, he said, required man to control his appetites; by observing it, man differed from the beasts. The decorum speciale allowed man to develop his individual talents; by assuming it, man differed from other men. In order to observe the decorum speciale, Cicero declared, man must watch himself and others. He must make a balanced estimate of his own ability, show himself a critical judge of his merits and defects, and know his disposition in order to play the role most suited to himself: nothing that runs against the grain of one’s nature can be right, and a man’s nature fits him best when it is the most characteristically his own.\textsuperscript{16} As Grimald translated the core of this argument, “In the pointing out the whole life, much more regard thereof must be had that in the continuing of our life we may agree with ourselves, and never halt in any duty.” This stipulation was given special emphasis in Grimald’s 1556 edition by the marginal note “know yourself.”\textsuperscript{17} Thus to know oneself became to be oneself or to be true to oneself, or, as Grimald put it in his Preface, to “use” oneself.

However, it should be understood that the decorum speciale did not imply an invitation for man to become an unrestrained individualist. Cicero modified his decorum speciale by the decorum of circumstances and choice; that is, he asked that every individual be aware of the requirements of his profession, status, age, and other external conditions. Most importantly, he considered individual decorum limited by general decorum, which prescribed man’s proper moral behavior as a rational being, fundamentally different from the animals. Thus the classical concept of decorum was a useful weapon in the Christian humanists’ fight against the flesh and the devil, who always took advantage of men who did not know what it truly meant to be man.

Shakespeare knew exactly how to use the arguments on decorum in this fashion. In Lucrece, he made his heroine engage in a lengthy attempt to dissuade Tarquin from his nefarious intention by appealing to his “likeness” or identity as a man and a prince. In the former role, she argues, he must control his appetites; in the latter, he must be a model to his subjects (568 ff.). She thus implores Tarquin to observe decorum. Quite properly she bases individual decorum on general decorum and sees it as modified by the circumstantial kind:
Tarquin cannot assume his likeness without behaving as he must as a human being and the son of a king. And Lucrece speaks very much to the point because, as the wiser sort of Shakespeare's readers must have known, his Tarquin is not only a rapist but also a horrible perverter of decorum. When he tries to excuse his desire for Lucrece to himself, he claims the privileges of a young lover and declares "sad pause and deep regard" to be the qualities that "beseeem" an old sage (274 ff.). Tarquin thus injects a rule of artistic decorum into an argument that requires the application of moral decorum—it is symptomatic that he visualizes his situation as if it were that of a young lover in a comedy who "beats these [i.e., sad pause and deep regard] from the stage." Shakespeare's moralizing in Lucrece may be obtrusive, but it has the advantage of showing up a basic scheme that underlies the humanistic patterns of self-knowledge and demonstrates their indebtedness to the concepts of temperance and moral decorum based on Ciceronian ethics. (See Appendix B.)

The preceding summary of the role that instruction on self-knowledge played in grammar school will have shown that it provided Shakespeare with some basic patterns that, coming mainly from the ancients, were selected and given emphasis by the Christian humanists. Before Shakespeare ever read an English tract on the significance of self-knowledge, he had been taught much about it. Whether he had an ardent desire to read such English moral tracts may be doubted, but it is reasonable to suppose that he would at least have dipped into some of them. He was, after all, a country boy with no university education, and it was for such as him that the authors and (since many tracts were translated from Latin or modern foreign languages) the translators provided.

A general account of sixteenth-century English nosce teipsum literature is thus in order. We may begin it with works that, in the tradition of Cicero and Plato, equated self-knowledge with the soul's knowledge of itself. Foremost in this category was A Treatise of the Immortality of the Soul by John Woolton (1576). Woolton, a divine who later became bishop of Exeter, claimed to be the first to write in English on the subject of the soul's immortality, a claim that is hardly tenable but is symptomatic of the humanists' conviction of doing something new even when, like Woolton, they were heavily indebted to the medieval moral and theological tradition. The humanistic de anima treatises, of which Woolton's book was a descendant, continued a medieval Christian genre, which in turn derived from Aris-
totle's work on the soul. Like his predecessors, Woolton defined, divided, and subdivided the soul; he located it in particular parts of the body; he established a hierarchy of operational elements that subordinated the senses and the passions to reason and made the ultimate functioning of this system dependent on divine grace. As was customary, Woolton saw the danger to man's physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being in the rebellion of the lower forces of the soul, a rebellion that had become endemic since the Fall. Man's moral problem was the conflict of his reason with his passions; his hope for overcoming it lay in achieving, with the help of God, control over himself. The key to this control was self-knowledge; as Woolton said in his Introduction, the greatest wisdom was to know oneself, the greatest folly, not to know oneself.

Woolton equated self-knowledge with the soul's knowing itself and therefore knowing other things, but most writers in the de anima tradition declared it to include an understanding of the body and its functions as well; in this case, too, soul and body were seen to be essentially different and the hegemony of the soul was thought to be divinely established. In the same year in which Woolton published his Treatise, Thomas Rogers, admittedly using his university notes, sent to press a work making these points, A Philosophical Discourse Entitled The Anatomy of the Mind. Like Woolton, Rogers explained the nature of the passions, classified them, and gave instructions on their pacification. He added a brief treatment of the cardinal virtues so that Christians might learn from pagans to become more virtuous. Like many nosce teipsum writers, Rogers emphasized the significance of man by describing him as a little world reflecting in himself the larger world of the universe.

The concept of the microcosm played as important a role in the humanistic thought of the Renaissance as it did in the Middle Ages. It was generally fathered on Aristotle, who was indeed, as far as is known, the first to use the term μικρὸς κόσμος—he used it only once—but who neither invented the macrocosmic analogies, which are much older, nor stated the concept in explicit terms. Its formulation seems to have been the work of Philo and other neo-Platonists, from whom medieval theologians appropriated it. The Christian humanists liked the concept because it agreed with their emphasis by attracting attention to man as both the epitome of the universe and its favored member. Man's recognition of himself as a microcosm was one of their basic postulates for achieving self-knowledge. Shakespeare's
Richard II is aware of this requirement; when he makes a final attempt to understand himself and his situation, he tries to create in his "little world" an image of the greater one (V.v.1 ff.).

Next to theologians, doctors were most in evidence as *nosce teipsum* authors. According to what Thomas Wright, himself a divine, said in the Preface to his *The Passions of the Mind* (1601), the subject of self-knowledge was the particular province of both the theologians, the curers of the soul, and the physicians, the curers of the body. Actually, the members of the two professions did not always confine themselves to their particular sphere of competence; there was much about the body in the theologians' treatises and much about the soul in the physicians'. The latter, however, were more apt to concern themselves with the physiological humors, which had evolved from the microcosm concept. They ascribed to them man's diseases as well as his emotional disturbances and thought man's health and happiness to depend on the right mixture of the humors or *crasis*, although they were not unanimous on the exact nature of that state. As we have already noted, the moral aspects of this equilibrium were also called "temperance"; the humoral balance constituted the physical side of that cardinal virtue central to self-knowledge and self-control. The ideal man of the physicians was of a temperament "exactly and perfectly temperate," as Levinus Lemnius described him in *The Touchstone of Complexions* (translated in 1565 and several times reprinted); he was the fortunate being in whom the elements, as in Shakespeare's Brutus, were so mixed as to make Nature stand up and say, "This is a man."

In basing mental stability and moral behavior on man's physical composition, the physicians were in danger of taking a materialistic position, which to the Elizabethans was equivalent to atheism; and indeed, the suspicion of harboring atheistic notions hovered about them as it did in the Middle Ages when Chaucer's Physician studied but little in the Bible. However, in their *nosce teipsum* tracts, this materialistic tendency was counteracted by theological references and arguments. The balanced man of Lemnius, for instance, was an ideal completely realized only in Christ.

Although the ultimate effect of the constant admonitions that man should know himself may have been secularizing, the tracts themselves spread a strongly religious aura with occasional shadings of *contemptus mundi*. The seminal work of this tradition, the eleventh-century *De Humanae Miseriae Conditione* of Pope Innocent III, was
still popular in sixteenth-century England; George Gascoigne incor-
porated a large section of this work in his *The Drum of Doomsday*
(1576; reprinted, 1586), and there was a full English version by
Humphrey Kerton, entitled *The Mirror of Man's Life* (1576; re-
printed, 1577, 1586). Pope Innocent described in gloomy colors the
beginning, progress, and ending of life; the misery, presumption,
vanity, and pride of man on earth; and the uncertainty of existence
contrasted with the certainty of death. Innocent took a much more
pessimistic view of man than did the Christian humanists; but since
he too dwelt on the antithesis of body and soul, depicting the former
in its horror and hideousness and the latter in its potential heavenly
honor, *contemptus mundi* touched *nosce teipsum* on an important
point. So, for that matter, did a related medieval convention, the
*consideratio*, a penitential exercise. It took its cue from biblical pas-
sages in which the notion of "considering" man is associated with
repentance for evildoing. In works like Bernard of Clairvaux's *De
Consideratione*, an examination of man's miserable state was pro-
claimed to be medicinal and purifying. This penitential strain of
*consideratio* was continued in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century
religious literature, where it was sometimes identified with self-
knowledge, as, for instance, in *De Contemptu Mundi*, by the Spanish
Jesuit Diego de Estella, which was twice translated, once in 1584
(Douay?) by Geoffrey Coulton and again in 1586 by none other than
the Protestant clergyman and *nosce teipsum* author Thomas Rogers.
In one of the book's most eloquent chapters, "The knowledge of our-
selves bringeth us to the knowledge of God," Diego took his cue from
Saint Augustine and argued that God was reflected merely darkly in
the human mind; in order to see his image more clearly, man needed
to humble himself by considering the misery of his body. The best
glass for a man to see himself in was another man; but this man had
to be considered not in the uncertain glory of his life but in the
misery of his death. The mirror of self-knowledge was not the flatter-
ing glass of life but the true image of death; man must prepare him-
self for the moment of facing it. This idea is vividly illustrated by an
early seventeenth-century emblem that shows death as a terminus
figure, holding a mirror, and a man's footprints tracing by him on
the ground; a banner above reads: "He has considered himself and
has departed." 23

These somber tones sounded in Elizabethan and Jacobean times no
less than in the Middle Ages. The dust into which man's body disin-
tegrated at death and the worms, the inheritors of this decay, were so demonstratively evoked as to jar sometimes our modern sensibilities that would rather evade this aspect of self-knowledge. But we cannot escape its power in some of Shakespeare's great passages, such as the pessimistic speeches of the dethroned Richard II or the Duke's preparation of Claudio for death in Measure for Measure (III.i.5 ff.). Even a character like Percy Hotspur, unreflective in nature, stammers a memorable memento mori in his last words, being mindful that he is nothing but dust. In the storm on the heath, as Lear strips himself and considers man in his nakedness, the consideratio achieves its ultimate expression; the thematic statement is accentuated by the king's violent gesture and fortissimo of pain.

Even if, as seems plausible, Shakespeare was not an avid reader of contemptus mundi literature, he was affected by the religious tone and by the otherworldly implications given to nosce teipsum. His was an age of universal church attendance, and self-knowledge, as he must have been told in many a sermon, involved a combat against earthly pride and a preparation for salvation. In the official Elizabethan homilies, appointed to be read in churches, these points were repeatedly made in the two introductory sermons, dealing with the salvation and the misery of mankind. Knowing oneself, the argument went, meant humbling oneself, acknowledging oneself to be but dust and ashes, and confessing to being a miserable sinner. When man submitted himself to the will of God, he recognized his dependence on Him and could thus hope to understand His nature: "The true knowledge of ourselves is very necessary to come to the right knowledge of God." Even man was endowed with a mortal body and an immortal soul in order to feel his sinfulness and misery and to be advised of the grace and goodness of God. His self-examination proved his capacity to choose between good and evil, between God and the devil.

The Calvinists, it is true, granted less to man's power of choice and more to God's. Calvinism was a major ingredient in the religious climate of Shakespeare's time and must not be neglected in this review of the theological implications of nosce teipsum. It is, of course, impossible here to do justice to Calvin's philosophy of man, but we may at least note some of the main points in which it differed from the Erasmian synthesis as well as from the evolving Anglican theology as represented by Richard Hooker's Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity.
Like the Elizabethan homily, which took a Christian-humanist point of view, John Calvin connected the knowledge of the self with the knowledge of God. There were only two kinds of knowledge, as Calvin said at the opening of the *Institutes*, and these were the knowledge of the self and the knowledge of God. But for him, self-knowledge had no independent value at all; one could know the self only by knowing God. Self-knowledge, for Calvin as for Saint Augustine, was merely God's light shining upon man. It is true that, much like the humanists, Calvin extolled the beauty of what he called "the philosophers' microcosm," that is, the symmetric form and the organic function of man's body and the excellence and acuity of his mind. But he referred here to prelapsarian man, to man as he might have been but no longer was. Calvin's concern was not with this ideal but with sinful and fallen mankind. Thus self-knowledge became for him, much as with the *contemptus mundi* writers, a recognition of man's ignorance, vanity, poverty, infamy, depravity, and corruption; it was the condition for accepting God as the only true wisdom, solid strength, perfect goodness, and complete righteousness. Although man was God's noblest work, his fall had made him a most lamentable ruin. Man's endeavor must be to restore the divine image in himself.

Calvin tended to disparage the role of reason in this process. He accused the philosophers of arrogance in prescribing rational rules for leading a virtuous and contented life. In unregenerated man, reason had been reduced to only a few weak sparks, insufficient to serve as a light to salvation. The self was not a balanced antithesis of body and soul, flesh and spirit, passion and reason, in which the latter elements could control the former. The whole of fallen man, body and soul, had become corrupt; not merely were the inferior appetites ensnared by the devil, but abominable impiety had also seized the citadel of the mind (II.i.9). For Calvin, we might say, man had already lost the warfare of life, which Erasmus thought he could win. His hope for regeneration lay only in the grace of God. But it was fortunate in this respect that God had put man in a turbulent, unquiet, and uncertain world. Thus man could realize that heaven and not earth was his real home. Calvin, however, did not conclude that one should therefore withdraw from life; in fact, he argued that Christians could prove God's grace as effective in themselves by laboring in their vocations and aiming at improvement. Thus *contemptus mundi* paradoxically proved the need for *activitas mundi*.

Calvinism's insistence that the whole man, including his reason,
was corrupt might have led to a total rejection of traditional pre-
scriptions of self-knowledge. When reason and will are assumed to be
as degenerate as the senses and the emotions, it will hardly do to
establish rational rules for self-control. Yet *nosce teipsum* authors
whose Calvinist leanings were like those of John Davies of Hereford
drew no such conclusion. Davies’s *Microcosmos* (1603) differed
from similar works only through a somewhat more skeptical attitude
toward the mind’s ability to discern the truth and a greater emphasis
on the misery of man and the inscrutability of God. And the conduct
books of the Puritans pursued the moral pulse-takings of the Chris-
tian humanists even more systematically than they.27

The major influence of Calvinism on the meaning of self-knowl-
edge in Shakespeare’s time appears to have been an emphasis on the
dependence of man on the grace of God, a dependence that was also
recognized at least in some form by non-Calvinists. As Berowne says
in *Love’s Labor’s Lost* (I.i.148–51) concerning control of the emo-
tions, “every man with his affects is born, / Not by might mast’red,
but by special grace.” According to Friar Lawrence in *Romeo and
Juliet* (II.iii.27–28), there are “two opposed camps” in man’s
psyche, “rude will” and “grace,” that is, the passions leagued with
the human will and reason aided by divine grace. The problem of
self-knowledge and self-control in Shakespeare is never the simple
one of the use of reason. In the theological overtones in his plays,
even Calvinists might have found much to commend.

If it is likely that Shakespeare furthered his education by reading
some books that propagated religious aspects of self-knowledge, it is
also probable that he, who came to designate himself a gentleman and
wrote plays about princes and noblemen, would seek to learn about
the specific application of self-knowledge to the nobility. But whether
he ever read aristocratic conduct books or not, he could not help
observing the ideals and practices of the nobility with which he came
in contact. His Christian-humanist education had taught him to
expect that *nosce teipsum* applied to all classes and estates. Thomas
Wright, who singled out divines and physicians as most apt to benefit
by his *Passions of the Mind*, in typically humanistic fashion went on
to generalize that also “the good Christian that attendeth to mortifi-
cation and the prudent civil gentleman that procureth a graceful con-
versation may reap some commodity touching their professions and,
in fine, every man may by this come to a knowledge of himself, which
ought to be preferred before all treasures and riches.”28 It must be
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said, however, that by and large the courtesy books written for the
nobility did not provide much of the commodity Wright so highly
acclaimed; those clearly in the tradition of Christian humanism were
exceptions.99 The most notable in this respect was Sir Thomas
Elyot’s Governor (1531), which applied the Delphic maxim to the
gentleman’s need to recognize that he had a body and a soul like any
other man, and that of liberty of will as much or as little was given to
an emperor as to a poor carter.90 Another humanistically oriented
book, greatly influential in England, was Pierre de la Primaudaye’s
French Academy, the four parts of which were translated between
1586 and 1618. Ostensibly written to record a conversation among
four young noblemen engaged in founding a courtly academy at
Anjou, The French Academy was actually a compendium of knowl­
dge radiating from the concept of self-knowledge. It has often been
drawn upon for studies of the intellectual history of the Renaissance
and for the background of Shakespeare’s ideas, and I have also made
considerable use of it. Yet it must be said that the Huguenot author’s
view of the aristocracy was colored by his Christian humanism and
that his value system did not reflect that of the nobility in general.
Even more of an outsider’s view was that of Laurence Humphrey in
The Nobles and of Nobility (1563), which teemed with demands that
noblemen must rule themselves, consider themselves, solitarily rever­
ence themselves, and, above all, know themselves. But then, Hum­
phrey was a clergyman and university educator inclined to Calvinism,
and he was not especially close to the aristocrats. The self-negation he
demanded of the noblemen clashed with their desire for self-expansion
and with the honor code. Elizabethan noblemen were certainly not
generally reputed for patience and humility.

In aristocratic circles, these restrictive virtues were thought to be
more appropriate for the gentlewoman than for the gentleman, and
the courtesy books recommended them as such.91 For instance, Gio­
vanni Bruto, in a tract translated in 1598, wanted a noble girl’s edu­
cation to be primarily one in humility and piety: “For that humility
is not only a Christian and civil vertue, but the foundation and pillar
of all Christian and civil vertues; and, because it engendereth in us
the knowledge of ourselves, as much as her weak mind may compre­
hend, she [the matron in charge of the girl’s education] shall show
her the wisdom of God, of his goodness and power.” 92 Only the gen­
tlewomen who knew themselves, that is, humbled themselves, could,
according to Bruto, be exalted.
Shakespeare's attitude in these matters owed as much to observation as to theory. He had the advantage of seeing aristocrats at close range, and he knew that some of them thought that what in mean men was entitled patience was cowardice in noble hearts. But his humanistic education had also prepared him to understand deeply and sympathetically the democratic equality of all flesh. Clay and clay might differ in dignity, but their dust was all alike. As to the noblewomen, some of his heroines are indeed endowed with the patience and humility that the courtesy books ordained for them, but they also are refreshingly more active and vital than one might expect those to have been who had gone through the kind of submissive training prescribed by Bruto. Here as elsewhere, Shakespeare's characterizations show, most of all, a sure sense for human values.

Among the books from which an Elizabethan could learn the meaning and significance of self-knowledge, we should finally not forget those that purported to address themselves to rulers. Since the princes were "the glass, the school, the book, / Where subjects' eyes do learn, do read, do look," as Shakespeare's Lucrece puts it (615–16), they had a particular obligation to know themselves thoroughly, and their subjects had a corresponding duty to study them as models. Although Machiavelli's portrait of the prince may have been more relevant to actual political practices in Tudor England than the moral tracts of the Christian humanists, the intellectual and spiritual climate favored the latter's theories. In drawing pictures of model rulers, the Christian humanists continued the tradition of medieval *specula principis*, adding their own educational programs. The seminal work here was Erasmus's *Institutio Principis Christiani* (1516). For Erasmus, the prince had to be, first of all, a good Christian and a good man, even though not every good man would necessarily make a good prince. But Erasmus believed that a balanced diet of classical and moral-religious instruction had a beneficial effect on the prince's ethical conduct of affairs. Similar, even if less urbanely phrased, arguments were voiced in *The Institution and First Beginning of a Christian Prince* (1571), which Sir James Chilvester translated from the French and dedicated to Queen Elizabeth. The prince's first prerequisite, said *The Institution*, was self-mastery. The fourth chapter expounded, "How that those which shall command others ought first to master themselves and so to suppress and moderate their affections and passions that, by their good lives, they may induce those that be subject to them to virtue and goodliness." Princes were asked to lay
away pride, insolence, and ambition and to acknowledge the common condition of mankind. If they were subject to moral infirmities, they were to subdue their imperfections by reason and frame themselves to gentleness, modesty, and humanity. To do so, they must "enter into themselves and have good consideration of their own proper natures and withal continually remember that they are but men, formed and made of the slime of the earth as others." This is the same moral as that of the de casibus tragedies narrated in The Mirror for Magistrates and dramatized in the plaintive speeches of Shakespeare's Richard II; it echoes still in Lear's self-discovery.

It would be tedious to examine all possible ways in which Shakespeare could have learned the significance and meaning of self-knowledge. The preceding survey is sufficient to demonstrate that admonitions to self-knowledge and prescriptions on achieving it were his regular moral and religious diet and that they had a Christian-humanist flavor. They were in the books he read in school and out of it, and they were in the sermons he heard. This moral indoctrination was lasting enough to have left impressions all through his works. Shakespeare was, and remained in some sort, a disciple of the Christian humanists. But his exquisite sense for what is truly human made him realize that human nature was recalcitrant and unpredictable and that all theory was inferior to reality. Some of his early plays, particularly Love's Labor's Lost and The Comedy of Errors, give evidence of his ironic amusement about being told so insistently to know himself. And the plays of his middle period give some indications that he saw weaknesses in the Christian-humanist picture of man. But I think there is proof that he never completely disowned Christian humanism and that he thought of self-knowledge always in terms at least related to it.

Although the Christian humanists' approach to self-knowledge was too theoretical and idealistic to lead to new discoveries about the nature of man, it offered, I think, some distinct advantages for dramatizing the human condition, advantages that Shakespeare consciously or instinctively realized. These fall into three major categories: first, the humanistic ideas of self-knowledge contained a method for self-examination; second, they provided a body of ideas on man that balanced favorable and unfavorable traits; and, third, they presented a viable ideal for mankind.

As to the first advantage, Christian humanism established a method for asking certain questions about man and his purpose that
Shakespeare could translate into dramatic terms. Although the nosce
 teipsum instructions were generally hortatory, they implied a pro-
 gram of self-questioning and sometimes put it into catechistic form.
 One of the best examples of this program was Sir James Perrott’s
 The First Part of the Consideration of Human Condition (1600), a
 short and, except for the form, quite traditional treatise. Sir James
 was stimulated by the Delphic maxim to dispense strong doses of
 contemptus mundi, consideratio, and memento mori. He presented
 this advice in a question-and-answer pattern by stipulating that a
 man who wants to know himself must ask himself certain questions,
 which fall under three headings, that is, questions on what man is,
 who he is, and what manner of man he is. To answer these, he
 claimed, other questions must be asked. Thus the answer to what
 man is requires an examination of what he is according to his creation, his
 life, and his death. Perrott’s method made self-search a quasi-
dramatic event, a dispute of the soul with itself. In a general way it
 thus provides a pattern for the struggle of Shakespeare’s heroes for
 clarity about themselves in the crisis of their lives; it resembles
 Richard II’s anguished introspection, Angelo’s confrontation with
 his true character, Hamlet’s existential probing of his mind, and,
 most of all, Lear’s agonizing ruminations on the human condition
 and his own. Of course, we need not therefore assume that Shake-
speare read The Consideration; but certainly he was familiar with
 its general method of self-questioning, which reflects both Ciceronian
 prescriptions of decorum and the introspection of the medieval con-
sideratio and gives them a humanistic emphasis.

A second advantage of the humanistic interpretation of nosce
 teipsum derived from its balance of optimism and pessimism concern-
ing man’s earthly existence. Even a writer as much addicted to
 contemptus mundi as Pierre Boaistuau felt evidently, after having
 written his Théâtre du monde (1558), that he needed to counter-
 balance the misery of man with his greatness. He thus added to his
 book a Bref discours de l’excellence et dignité de l’homme (1558),
 and it was this composite volume that, translated by John Alday as
 Theatrum Mundi (1566, 1574, 1581), attained a considerable popu-
 larity in England. According to the first part of the work, man is
deplorably ignorant of himself: “He is so masked and disguised that
 he knoweth not himself; he is the beginner and foreshower of things
 contained in the circuit of this world, and yet he is blind and dumb
 in his own doings.” According to the second part, however, he is
god-like in his erectness, endowed with a divine mind, and capable of greatness. The same paradoxical assessment of man is presented in a stanza, more morally edifying than poetically pleasing, added during one of the numerous augmentations of the ever popular Treatise of Moral Philosophy by William Baldwin (1564; first edition, 1547):

Man, that consisteth of body and of soul,
Is God's own creature, specially made
To know his maker, also to control
Such lusts in flesh as elements persuade—
A beast, if that his life be beastly trade,
An earthly God, if void of hope and hate
He live content and know his own estate.88

Here is the basic Christian-humanist paradox, which we know best through Hamlet's splendid résumé "What a piece of work is a man!" This piece of work, which Hamlet knows how to praise even if he does not like it, is a quintessence of dust that, in apprehension, is like a god. (See Appendix C.) Shakespeare's tragic heroes embody this precarious dignity of man; it is their main claim to human greatness.

Third, and perhaps most important, the Christian humanists' prescriptions for self-knowledge provided Shakespeare with a feeling that men were, in essence, very much alike. An anecdote in the dedication of John Woolton's Immortality of the Soul illustrates this pervasive humanistic feeling. This is a story about a visit by the painter Apelles to the shop of his colleague Protogenes. Apelles found there only an old woman who did not recognize him and asked him for his name. In answer, Apelles drew an extremely fine and small line on the table, remarking that it would reveal his identity. And, indeed, on his return, Protogenes immediately realized who had been the caller. A modern reader of this anecdote would probably surmise that it demonstrates how one man differs from the other just as the line of one artist differs from that of another; but that, characteristically, was not Woolton's conclusion. Rather, Woolton moralized, the fact that Protogenes recognized the line shows that all creation testifies to its creator; the wonderful composition of man is therefore proof of the greatness of God. Man is God's finest creation; if he knows himself, he sees himself as a little world that reflects the larger world, both created by God.
Obviously, such prescriptions for self-knowledge could not lead to psychological discoveries; they could not really demonstrate why men draw infinitely varied lines. Shakespeare, from his own observation, knew better, and he also must have become aware of other theoretical ways to consider men, ways that promised to show them as they really were. These new approaches and their conflict with the traditional methods will be the subject of the following chapter. But it would be erroneous to think of the humanists' approach as a mere blind alley. The general picture of man that they established provided Shakespeare at the outset of his career with a feeling of norms that he could use and imitate, just as he could use the figures of speech and other devices of rhetoric. When he was asked to hold a mirror up to himself, he was expected to see a double image, his own superimposed upon an ideal image of man, and to adjust his own features as much as possible to the ideal portrait. In such fashion, Shakespeare was given human norms that helped him to classify and describe the bewildering variety of human characters, to create deviations from the ideal pattern, like Richard II, or close approaches to it, like Henry V. As Shakespeare came to realize, the Christian humanists' explanation of human behavior was in need of revision, but their ideals remained admirable.