More than one critic has claimed that Shakespeare's poem *Lucrece* was a most important preparatory work for his later tragic art. It should also be noted that the poem is suffused with theoretical patterns of self-knowledge as hardly any other of Shakespeare's works. These attach, in particular, to Tarquin, who is an early example of a Shakespearean hero prompted by passion to commit a spectacular act of folly and crime; he is a very general model for the later Othello, Lear, Antony, and, most of all, Macbeth. A brief demonstration may here suffice to show how this conception arose from Shakespeare's study of humanistic ideas of self-knowledge, especially as they concerned the virtue of temperance and the obligation of moral decorum.

The story was ready-made for a tragic interpretation that stressed Tarquin's self-loss. In *De Legibus* (II.iv.10), Cicero depicted Tarquin as a public figure whose lack of self-knowledge brought about a dangerous political situation, and La Primaudaye summarized the story of Tarquin's crime and fall as an illustration of a particularly serious manifestation of intemperance because committed by a prince. The tragedy of Lucrece presented a more difficult problem because of Christian objections to suicide in general and to the glorification of hers, in particular, by Saint Augustine in *The City of God* (1.19). But in the literature with which Shakespeare is likely to have had direct acquaintance, sympathetic accounts prevailed. Renaissance moralists, particularly those that concerned themselves with the education of women, noted her as an example of chastity, which she demonstrated in her fidelity to her husband. Thus the theologian Thomas Rogers thought her an example from which Christians could learn self-knowledge and lauded her chastity,
a major ingredient in the complex of virtues represented by temperance as it applied to women.³

I believe that Shakespeare presented her sympathetically; but she need not concern us here except for the contrast she offers to Tarquin in the earlier parts of the poem, when she becomes an almost personified temperance. The contrast between temperance and intemperance is here woven into the poem’s fabric, most notably in the pervasive juxtaposition of light and dark tones. Thus when Tarquin hears of Lucrece’s beauty, envy “taints” his heart (38). By contrast, “silver-white” virtue stains the blushing beauty of Lucrece (56). The dark pigments of envy, greed, hate, hypocrisy, and deceit blend into the blackness of intemperance; the luminous hues of beauty, honor, chastity, and holiness softly encircle the whiteness of temperance.⁴

In this atmosphere of color symbolism, the lengthy internal conflict in Tarquin proceeds. It is a “debate” in the Elizabethan sense of the word as not only an intellectual argument but also a contention of opposing forces. In Tarquin’s case, the concupiscible appetite, leagued with his will, is locked in a deadly combat with his reason. The vehemence of the struggle is such that Tarquin’s soul, as Shakespeare says in an image frequent among the moralists, resembles a tempest-tossed ship (171, 279). In La Primaudaye’s words, “as the winds torment and toss that ship which they have seized upon now here, now there and will not suffer it to be guided by her master, so intemperance, moving and compelling the soul to disobey reason, suffereth her not to enjoy tranquillity and rest, which is an assured heaven of harbor from all the winds” (p. 81). Tarquin is allured by the pleasures that, as La Primaudaye said, “flatter us with disguised visage and, when they depart, they leave us full of sorrow and sadness” (p. 224). The “honest fear” that attempts to pull him back is the shame or shamefacedness allied with temperance: “There is, saith Cicero, a certain shame and bashfulness in temperance, which is the guardian of all vertues and deserveth great commendation, being also a most goodly ornament of the whole life, as that which fashioneth it according to the pattern of decency and honesty” (p. 242).

Temporarily, Tarquin’s “honest fear,” the ally of his conscience, makes him see his evil purpose in the right perspective; he asks himself in the biblical losing-finding antithesis: “What win I if I gain the joy I seek?” and he answers appropriately that the prize is
nothing but a dream, a breath, a fleeting joy, and a toy (211-13). But Tarquin acts against his better knowledge; although reason has irrefutable arguments to make him desist, will, which has already become "reprobate desire," wins out, and he stamps out "reason's weak removing" (243). "There is," says La Primaudaye, "no kind of dissoluteness wherein the intemperate man plungeth not himself, no wickedness or cruelty which he executeth not for satisfying of his unclean desires and insatiable lusts, no fear or imminent danger which can draw him back" (p. 182). Tarquin thus braces himself: "Who fears a sentence or an old man's saw / Shall by a painted cloth be kept in awe" (244-45). He rationalizes his moral weakness into martial courage like La Primaudaye's intemperate man, who "laboreth oftentimes to procure that glory and honor should be given to his most cursed and execrable misdemeanors, imagining and fancying with himself dreams answerable and agreeable to that he most desires" (p. 182). Tarquin pleads the superiority of love and beauty over moral scruples and extols the glory that is attached to conquering the object of love. Instead of ruling appetite by reason as the moralists demanded, Tarquin enlists under the banner of passion and makes affection his "captain" (271 ff.). Like the oath-breaking courtiers of Navarre in Love's Labor's Lost, he becomes one of "affection's men-at-arms," but with the difference that the affection he calls love is lust and has tragic consequences. Instead of keeping the frail part of his mind bound as Cicero demanded, Tarquin "heartens up his servile powers" (295). The psychology of this disastrous subversion is traditional: on the prompting of the eye, affection corrupts the heart and inveigles it to revolt against reason. Tarquin implicitly acknowledges the moral disaster when he pretends to fear no "sinking"; this is the imagery in which the moralists warned against the subjugation of the will: to make affection the pilot is to provoke a storm of passion that wrecks the ship of the soul.5

From a rationalizer, who speciously attempts to persuade himself that evil is good, Tarquin turns into a perverter of values. When he contends that "sad pause and deep regard beseems the sage" (278), he states the important moral doctrine Cicero placed in the center of the teaching of temperance, the doctrine of decorum, or the rule of what beseems a man. "In temperance," said La Primaudaye, "a man may behold modesty, with the privation of every perturbation in the soul, as also a way how to frame all things according to that
which is decent or seemly, which the Latins call decorum, being a convenience meet for the excellence of man and that wherein his nature differeth from other living creatures" (p. 171).

A kind of dramatic examination of this decorum is central to the Tarquin part of the poem, first in the rapist's perversion of the doctrine, then in Lucrece's counterarguments that restate it in orthodox fashion. Tarquin's insistence that what "beseems" him is the part of youth that beats "sad pause and deep regard" from the stage applies the rules not of moral but of aesthetic decorum, which derived from literary criticism. The image itself may actually have come to Shakespeare through a line in Horace in which the poet, speaking as an old roué, orders himself to make place for youth "lest he be beaten away by this age, for which wantonness is more becoming." But Tarquin also can be said to see himself quite generally in the stereotyped role of the young lover of comedy with the temeritas, appetitus, libido, and cupiditas proper to the part. However, Tarquin does not beat off the stage the competitor of Juventus in Roman comedy, that is, the senex amans with his timiditas, tristitia, and severitas, which are temporarily muted by his libido, but rather he rejects the qualities of aged prudence that both the commentators of Terence and the moralists admired and associated with ratio: respect, pause, and regard. These were high up in the humanistic scale of values espoused by Shakespeare. Tarquin's choice of the role of a lascivious youth is definitely perverse from the point of view of moral decorum, which decreed temperance and thus the control of the appetites. For Cicero, the law of nature was violated when the appetites escaped the rein of reason and galloped away to overleap all bounds of measure. For Tarquin, "nothing can Affection's course control, / Or stop the headlong fury of his speed" (500-501).

This rejection of all hindrances makes Tarquin very much the intemperate man the moralists described. In La Primaudaye's words, "Thus we see that intemperance, as Cicero saith, is the mother of all perturbations in the soul and causeth man, as Socrates said, to differ nothing from a beast because he never thinketh upon that which is best but only seeketh how to satisfy and content the unbridled desires of pleasure and lust, having no more use of reason than beasts have" (p. 181). Lucrece's attempt to dissuade Tarquin from his nefarious intention must therefore fail: "Like a white hind under the grype's sharp claws," she "Pleads, in a wilderness where
are no laws, / To the rough beast that knows no gentle right”—a beast that obeys nothing but “his foul appetite” (543 ff.). Like Edmund and Iago, Tarquin recognizes only the law of the jungle.

Yet Lucrece continues to plead in this wilderness—for fifteen long stanzas—before Tarquin stops her. She becomes here the mouthpiece of temperance, proclaiming, at times quite abstractly, the greatness of this virtue and refuting Tarquin’s specious arguments for passion and crime. Temperance is for her La Primaudaye’s virtue that comprehends all others and through which “a harmony, concordance, and conjunction of them all is made” (p. 172). She implores Tarquin by what was dear to him before he became passion’s slave, by knighthood, friendship, holy human law, common loyalty, heaven and earth, sacred hospitality, and human pity. But her climactic argument, like Tarquin’s, turns on the doctrine of decorum. Shakespeare made her unconsciously answer Tarquin’s treatment of the subject that provided the rationale for his attack. Lucrece now asks him to desist for his own sake and become again the man in whose “likeness” she entertained him (596). With this appeal, she admonishes Tarquin to observe the individual decorum that he perversely distorted when he saw himself in the role of a young lover. But her final appeal turns on what Cicero called the decorum of circumstance, the proper behavior according to profession and age. She asks him to envisage the shame that will be “seeded in thine age,” when “thus thy vices bud before thy spring!” (604)—an argument that refutes Tarquin’s adoption of the “part of youth.” She goes on to remind him of his obligation to be an example for the people: “For princes are the glass, the school, the book, / Where subjects’ eyes do learn, do read, do look” (615–16). Her admonishment echoes the humanists’ demand that the prince must be the moral example, the pattern of his people. So, for instance, Chelidonius: “The prince . . . is, as it were, a theatre and glass that the world should behold.”

Lucrece subsequently backs up her argument on the decorum of circumstance by admonishing Tarquin to realize the paradoxical nature of his situation, in which he, a prince, is enslaved by passion. This is another strain of reasoning conventional in the teaching of temperance. In the same chapter on voluptuousness and lechery in which La Primaudaye summarized the story of Tarquin’s fall, he asked the question whether the incontinent man can be called free and answered that nobody can be called a master that is a slave to
pleasure and lust (p. 226). Lucrece tries to restrain Tarquin with moral paradoxes of this kind, generally based on the fifth paradox in Cicero's Paradoxa Stoicorum, that "all wise men are free and all fools are slaves," but I shall forbear to list the commonplace parallels. The paradoxes that do not stop Tarquin have a way of inundating the reader.

Of the rape itself, we are offered only the sparsest account—Lucrece's stifled cry and her tears, in which Tarquin bathes his hot face, are the only physical details. At the climactic moment of the poem, Shakespeare concentrated on the effect of the act on Tarquin's, the criminal's, soul. And that was quite in agreement with the theme of temperance and intemperance, of which, according to La Primaudaye, the soul is the proper subject (p. 170). We are by the winning-losing antithesis (689) reminded of what is at stake and are told that Tarquin's psychic forces revert from joy to pain, from desire to disdain, and that his self-will has become tired like a jade. The struggle of passion and reason in Tarquin has led to the spiritual collapse that La Primaudaye described to be the final result of intemperance: "The sensual and unreasonable part of the soul contendeth no more with reason—which then is, as it were, stark dead and suffereth itself to be carried to ugly and unnatural vices and to all fleshly desires—because the divine part of the soul is weakened in such sort that she hath no more strength nor feeling of her essence, which is an enemy to vice" (p. 181). Shakespeare put the idea in words that, like La Primaudaye's, echoed the Pauline terminology of the battle of flesh and spirit: "The flesh being proud, Desire doth fight with Grace, / For there it revels; and when that decays, / The guilty rebel for remission prays" (711—14).

Shakespeare symbolized the collapse of Tarquin's reason in an allegory familiar from Spenser's Faerie Queene (II.ix,xi). Like Spenser's Alma, Tarquin's soul is mistress of a castle beleaguered by sins and vices. In agreement with the pagan context of Lucrece, the soul is a priestess inhabiting a "temple" and through Tarquin's act deprived of her power of prescience; the "consecrated wall" of her dwelling is now pulled down. But the most dire effect is that Tarquin's soul has lost its immortality and become "thrall / To living death and pain perpetual" (725—26).

This concern not only with Lucrece's but also with Tarquin's soul (in fact, more with Tarquin's) is, at first sight, astonishing. But the poem is conceived as not merely depicting the tragedy of the
heroine but also, at least as poignantly, that of the hero. It is the latter's tragedy, one of subjection to intemperance, that effects the former's. This connection is imaginatively underlined by the pervasive siege imagery that has one of its climaxes in the account of the defeat of Tarquin's soul. This strain of images begins with Tarquin's setting out to attack the "never-conquered fort" of Lucrece, is continued in some details of the account of the rape, as in the likening of Lucrece's breasts to ivory towers, and carried over into the Lucrece part of the poem. Here the heroine considers the tapestry depicting the fall of Troy and draws the analogy between Sinon and Tarquin: "As Priam him did cherish, / So did I Tarquin; so my Troy did perish" (1546-47). And again the trope of the siege appears when Lucrece ponders suicide because she feels her soul's "mansion batter'd by the enemy: / Her sacred temple spotted, spoil'd, corrupted" (1171-72). The act of intemperance unites violator and victim and gives the whole poem a unity of imagery and tone that modern readers interested in psychology but impatient of soul analysis, the original concern of this science, may easily miss.

Incidentally, Shakespeare has been criticized for making Tarquin disappear so suddenly after his crime by dropping him from the picture and barely reporting his banishment at the end of the poem. But this immediate departure is quite in agreement with the moralists' description of gratified lust. "The repentance of an incontinent man," said La Primaudaye, "followeth hard at the heels of his sin and transgression" (p. 170). And thus Tarquin speeds away, "a heavy convertite." The external catastrophe, in this case Tarquin's perpetual banishment, is a natural consequence of the internal catastrophe, the destruction of his soul. Tarquin's deed, however, remains in the reader's mind throughout the remainder of the poem, not only because of Lucrece's lamentations and veiled references, such as the analogy to the lust that felled Troy, but also because of the continuing imagery of staining and polluting. The stain on Tarquin's soul has infected Lucrece and it spreads beyond into Rome. It is in order to remove this blemish in her soul and to restore her reputation that Lucrece commits suicide.

I shall touch briefly on Lucrece's pollution images because they constitute her main commentary on Tarquin's tragedy. The series of these images is introduced by the question "Why should the worm intrude the maiden bud?" and concludes with the generalization "But
no perfection is so absolute / That some impurity does not pollute” (848-54). Lucrece appears to ask here the question why there is such a thing as a tragic flaw and, in some sense, to give an answer. But the question is not clearly and directly posed, and neither is it, I think, satisfactorily answered from a philosophic point of view. That would have meant to write a philosophic disquisition, for which Shakespeare was hardly prepared and which would have taken something away from the final mystery that enshrouds all evil—a mystery that Shakespeare later found an effective dramatic device. In Lucrece’s questions, the images have ambiguous referents. Although the cankerworm settled in the maidenbud is logically associated with the “tyrant folly” that lurks in “gentle breasts” (851) and thus with the lust that vitiated Tarquin’s rationality, the vivid figure also brings to mind the thrust of the rapist at the victim, and the maidenbudd suggests the actual excellence of Lucrece even more than the deceptive one of Tarquin. The figure supports the generalization of the vulnerability of all perfection, which, however, raises in turn the question why evil has such a destructive force. Lucrece does ask the latter question without answering it when she censors the treacherous Sinon while she views the wall painting of Troy: “For one’s offence why should so many fall, / To plague a private sin in general?” (1483).

All this resembles the explorations of the nature of evil and crime one finds in Seneca’s dramas, from which, indeed, it appears, Shakespeare borrowed here, perhaps, as has been suggested, via a commonplace book such as Illustrium Poetarum Flores of Octavianus Mirandola. Seneca, the tragedian (as opposed to the philosopher), gave no answer to the question of the involvement of the innocent in guilt; and neither did Shakespeare in Lucrece, whatever he may have thought privately on the subject. In her apostrophes to Night, Time, and Opportunity, and in her comments on the Troy painting, Lucrece does not seek to explain what exactly the tragic flaw is and how it comes about except for saying that it is an imperfection in a universe constructed to allow, for whatever reason, such imperfection to become destructive. Without the help of Night, Opportunity, and Time, Tarquin could not have accomplished his deed; they “blew the fire when temperance was thawed” (838), and the fall of Troy shows by the most famous historical example that the world has always had its Tarquins and Lucreces. A universe such as Lucrece sees it—she may be said to assume a choric function—is
eminently brittle and mutable. Tragedy in it is abetted by fortune and accident, and the chastest bodies like the greatest citadels are not able to control the forces of rape and destruction.

Lucrece's consideration of the destructiveness of evil, of course, does not excuse Tarquin nor does it modify the analysis of Tarquin's imperfection as intemperance in the way it is given in the poem. And this analysis bore its fruit in the subtler dramatic presentation of Shakespeare's later tragic heroes. Like Tarquin, these suffer a moral failure that has spiritual consequences; they fall prey to passion, let their wills and passions pander their reason, pervert individual and general decorum, struggle in the grip of conflicting emotions and have temporary recoils before they finally damage their souls. As is true for Tarquin, the evil these heroes commit radiates outward, enthralls their victims' souls, and makes the whole state a scene of woe. But if these heroes lose themselves in a fashion similar to Tarquin, the processes of thought and emotion they undergo are less schematic and more plausible. When Macbeth loses himself, he is not conscious, as is Tarquin, of the deep moral consequences, even if we are. If Lucrece was for Shakespeare, as he called it in the Dedication, a "pamphlet," it was such in the sense of presenting a program for his later dramatic practices, but a program that he modified considerably.