

# LUCRECE

*By* WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

*Edited by* BARBARA A. MOWAT  
*and* PAUL WERSTINE

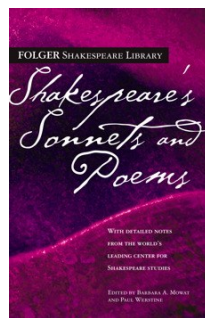
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# Contents

Front Matter	From the Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library
	Textual Introduction
	Dedication
Lucrece	Argument
	Lucrece

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## From the Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library

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I want to express my deep thanks to editors Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine for creating these indispensable editions of Shakespeare's works, which incorporate the best of textual scholarship with a richness of commentary that is both inspired and engaging. Readers who want to know more about Shakespeare and his plays can follow the paths these distinguished scholars have tread by visiting the Folger either in-person or online, where a range of physical and digital resources exists to supplement the material in these texts. I commend to you these words, and hope that they inspire.

*Michael Witmore*  
Director, Folger Shakespeare Library

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## Textual Introduction

### By Barbara Mowat and Paul Werstine

Until now, with the release of The Folger Shakespeare (formerly Folger Digital Texts), readers in search of a free online text of Shakespeare's plays and poems had to be content primarily with using the Moby™ Text, which reproduces a late-nineteenth century version of the plays and poems. What is the difference? Many ordinary readers assume that there is a single text of all these works: what Shakespeare wrote. But Shakespeare's plays were not published the way modern novels or plays are published today: as a single, authoritative text. In some cases, the plays have come down to us in multiple published versions, represented by various Quartos (Qq) and by the great collection put together by his colleagues in 1623, called the First Folio (F). There are, for example, three very different versions of *Hamlet*, two of *King Lear*, *Henry V*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and others. Editors choose which version to use as their base text, and then amend that text with words, lines or speech prefixes from the other versions that, in their judgment, make for a better or more accurate text.

Other editorial decisions involve choices about whether an unfamiliar word could be understood in light of other writings of the period or whether it should be changed; decisions about words that made it into Shakespeare's text by accident through four hundred years of printings and misprinting; and even decisions based on cultural preference and taste. When the Moby™ Text was created, for example, it was deemed "improper" and "indecent" for Miranda to chastise Caliban for having attempted to rape her. (See *The Tempest*, 1.2: "Abhorred slave,/Which any print of goodness wilt not take,/Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee..."). All Shakespeare editors at the time took the speech away from her and gave it to her father, Prospero.

The editors of the Moby™ Shakespeare produced their text long before scholars fully understood the proper grounds on which to make the thousands of decisions that Shakespeare editors face. The Folger Library Shakespeare Editions, on which the Folger Shakespeare texts depend, make this editorial process as nearly transparent as is possible, in contrast to older texts, like the Moby™, which hide editorial interventions. The reader of the Folger Shakespeare knows where the text has been altered because editorial interventions are signaled by square brackets (for example, from *Othello*: "[If she in chains of magic were not bound,]"), half-square brackets (for example, from *Henry V*: "With [blood] and sword and fire to win your right,"), or angle brackets (for example, from

*Hamlet*: “O farewell, honest (soldier.) Who hath relieved/you?”). At any point in the text, you can hover your cursor over a bracket for more information.

Because the Folger Shakespeare texts are edited in accord with twenty-first century knowledge about Shakespeare’s texts, the Folger here provides them to readers, scholars, teachers, actors, directors, and students, free of charge, confident of their quality as texts of the plays and pleased to be able to make this contribution to the study and enjoyment of Shakespeare.

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TO THE RIGHT  
HONORABLE, HENRY  
Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton,  
and Baron of Titchfield.

The love I dedicate to your Lordship is without end; whereof this pamphlet without beginning is but a superfluous moiety. The warrant I have of your honorable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance. What I have done is yours; what I have to do is yours; being part in all I have, devoted yours. Were my worth greater, my duty would show greater; meantime, as it is, it is bound to your Lordship, to whom I wish long life still lengthened with all happiness.

Your Lordship’s in all duty,  
William Shakespeare

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## ***THE ARGUMENT***

Lucius Tarquinius, for his excessive pride surnamed Superbus, after he had caused his own father-in-law Servius Tullius to be cruelly murdered and, contrary to the Roman laws and customs, not requiring or staying for the people's suffrages, had possessed himself of the kingdom, went accompanied with his sons and other noblemen of Rome to besiege Ardea; during which siege, the principal men of the army meeting one evening at the tent of Sextus Tarquinius, the King's son, in their discourses after supper every one commended the virtues of his own wife; among whom Collatinus extolled the incomparable chastity of his wife Lucretia. In that pleasant humor they all posted to Rome, and intending by their secret and sudden arrival to make trial of that which every one had before avouched, only Collatinus finds his wife, though it were late in the night, spinning amongst her maids; the other ladies were all found dancing and reveling or in several disports; whereupon the noblemen yielded Collatinus the victory and his wife the fame. At that time Sextus Tarquinius, being inflamed with Lucrece's beauty, yet smothering his passions for the present, departed with the rest back to the camp; from whence he shortly after privily withdrew himself and was, according to his estate, royally entertained and lodged by Lucrece at Collatium. The same night he treacherously stealeth into her chamber, violently ravished her, and early in the morning speedeth away. Lucrece, in this lamentable plight, hastily dispatcheth messengers, one to Rome for her father, another to the camp for Collatine. They came—the one accompanied with Junius Brutus, the other with Publius Valerius—and, finding Lucrece attired in mourning habit, demanded the cause of her sorrow. She, first taking an oath of them for her revenge, revealed the actor and whole manner of his dealing, and withal suddenly stabbed herself. Which done, with one consent they all vowed to root out the whole hated family of the Tarquins; and, bearing the dead body to Rome, Brutus acquainted the people with the doer and manner of the vile deed, with a bitter invective against the tyranny of the King, wherewith the people were so moved that with one consent and a general acclamation the Tarquins were all exiled and the state government changed from kings to consuls.

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## *Lucrece*

From the besieged Ardea all in post,  
Borne by the trustless wings of false desire,  
Lust-breathed Tarquin leaves the Roman host  
And to Collatium bears the lightless fire  
Which, in pale embers hid, lurks to aspire 5  
    And girdle with embracing flames the waist  
    Of Collatine's fair love, Lucrece the chaste.

Haply that name of "chaste" unhapp'ly set  
This bateless edge on his keen appetite  
When Collatine unwisely did not let 10  
To praise the clear unmatched red and white  
Which triumphed in that sky of his delight,  
    Where mortal stars, as bright as heaven's beauties,  
    With pure aspects did him peculiar duties.

For he the night before, in Tarquin's tent, 15  
Unlocked the treasure of his happy state,  
What priceless wealth the heavens had him lent  
In the possession of his beauteous mate,  
Reck'ning his fortune at such high proud rate  
    That kings might be espoused to more fame, 20  
    But king nor peer to such a peerless dame.

O, happiness enjoyed but of a few,  
And, if possessed, as soon decayed and done  
As is the morning's silver melting dew  
Against the golden splendor of the sun! 25  
An expired date, canceled ere well begun.  
    Honor and beauty in the owner's arms  
    Are weakly fortified from a world of harms.

Beauty itself doth of itself persuade  
The eyes of men without an orator; 30  
What needeth then apology be made  
To set forth that which is so singular?  
Or why is Collatine the publisher  
    Of that rich jewel he should keep unknown  
    From thievish ears because it is his own? 35

Perchance his boast of Lucrece' sov'reignty  
Suggested this proud issue of a king,  
For by our ears our hearts oft tainted be.

Perchance that envy of so rich a thing,  
Braving compare, disdainfully did sting 40  
His high-pitched thoughts, that meaner men should vaunt  
That golden hap which their superiors want.

But some untimely thought did instigate  
His all too timeless speed, if none of those.  
His honor, his affairs, his friends, his state 45  
Neglected all, with swift intent he goes  
To quench the coal which in his liver glows.  
O, rash false heat, wrapped in repentant cold,  
Thy hasty spring still blasts and ne'er grows old!

When at Collatium this false lord arrived, 50  
Well was he welcomed by the Roman dame,  
Within whose face Beauty and Virtue strived  
Which of them both should underprop her fame.  
When Virtue bragged, Beauty would blush for shame;  
When Beauty boasted blushes, in despite 55  
Virtue would stain that o'er with silver white.

But Beauty, in that white entitulèd  
From Venus' doves, doth challenge that fair field.  
Then Virtue claims from Beauty Beauty's red,  
Which Virtue gave the golden age to gild 60  
Their silver cheeks, and called it then their shield,  
Teaching them thus to use it in the fight:  
When shame assailed, the red should fence the white.

This heraldry in Lucrece' face was seen,  
Argued by Beauty's red and Virtue's white. 65  
Of either's color was the other queen,  
Proving from world's minority their right.  
Yet their ambition makes them still to fight,  
The sovereignty of either being so great  
That oft they interchange each other's seat. 70

This silent war of lilies and of roses,  
Which Tarquin viewed in her fair face's field,  
In their pure ranks his traitor eye encloses,  
Where, lest between them both it should be killed,  
The coward captive vanquishèd doth yield 75  
To those two armies that would let him go  
Rather than triumph in so false a foe.

Now thinks he that her husband's shallow tongue,  
The niggard prodigal that praised her so,  
In that high task hath done her beauty wrong, 80  
Which far exceeds his barren skill to show.



Therefore that praise which Collatine doth owe  
Enchanted Tarquin answers with surmise,  
In silent wonder of still-gazing eyes.

This earthly saint, adorèd by this devil, 85  
Little suspecteth the false worshiper,  
For unstained thoughts do seldom dream on evil;  
Birds never limed no secret bushes fear.  
So, guiltless, she securely gives good cheer  
And reverend welcome to her princely guest, 90  
Whose inward ill no outward harm expressed.

For that he colored with his high estate,  
Hiding base sin in pleats of majesty,  
That nothing in him seemed inordinate,  
Save sometimes too much wonder of his eye, 95  
Which, having all, all could not satisfy,  
But, poorly rich, so wanteth in his store  
That, cloyed with much, he pineth still for more.

But she, that never coped with stranger eyes,  
Could pick no meaning from their parling looks 100  
Nor read the subtle shining secrecies  
Writ in the glassy margents of such books.  
She touched no unknown baits nor feared no hooks,  
Nor could she moralize his wanton sight  
More than his eyes were opened to the light. 105

He stories to her ears her husband's fame,  
Won in the fields of fruitful Italy,  
And decks with praises Collatine's high name,  
Made glorious by his manly chivalry  
With bruised arms and wreaths of victory. 110  
Her joy with heaved-up hand she doth express  
And, wordless, so greets heaven for his success.

Far from the purpose of his coming thither  
He makes excuses for his being there.  
No cloudy show of stormy blust'ring weather 115  
Doth yet in his fair welkin once appear,  
Till sable Night, mother of dread and fear,  
Upon the world dim darkness doth display  
And in her vaulty prison stows the day.

For then is Tarquin brought unto his bed, 120  
Intending weariness with heavy sprite,  
For after supper long he questionèd  
With modest Lucrece and wore out the night.  
Now leaden slumber with life's strength doth fight,

And everyone to rest himself betakes, 125  
Save thieves and cares and troubled minds that wakes;

As one of which 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 proposed,  
Though death be adjunct, there's no death supposed.

Those that much covet are with gain so fond  
That 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 bankrout in this poor-rich gain. 140

The aim of all is but to nurse the life  
With honor, 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 honor in fell battle's rage, 145  
Honor for wealth; and oft that wealth doth cost  
The death of all, and all together 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 honor 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?

Now stole upon the time the dead of night,  
When heavy sleep had closed up mortal eyes.  
No comfortable star did lend his light;  
No noise but owls' and wolves' death-boding cries 165  
Now serves the season that they may surprise  
The silly lambs. Pure thoughts are dead and still,

While Lust and Murder wakes to stain and kill.

And now this lustful lord leapt from his bed,  
Throwing his mantle rudely o'er his arm; 170  
Is madly tossed between desire and dread;  
Th' one sweetly flatters, th' other feareth harm,  
But honest fear, bewitched with lust's foul charm,  
Doth too too oft betake him to retire,  
Beaten away by brainsick rude desire. 175

His falchion on a flint he softly smiteth,  
That from the cold stone sparks of fire do fly,  
Whereat a waxen torch forthwith he lighteth,  
Which must be lodestar to his lustful eye,  
And to the flame thus speaks advisedly: 180  
"As from this cold flint I enforced this fire,  
So Lucrece must I force to my desire."

Here pale with fear he doth premeditate  
The dangers of his loathsome enterprise,  
And in his inward mind he doth debate 185  
What following sorrow may on this arise.  
Then, looking scornfully, he doth despise  
His naked armor of still-slaughtered lust  
And justly thus controls his thoughts unjust:

"Fair torch, burn out thy light, and lend it not 190  
To darken her whose light excelleth thine.  
And die, unhallowed thoughts, before you blot  
With your uncleanness that which is divine.  
Offer pure incense to so pure a shrine.  
Let fair humanity abhor the deed 195  
That spots and stains love's modest snow-white weed.

"O, shame to knighthood and to shining arms!  
O, foul dishonor to my household's grave!  
O, impious act including all foul harms!  
A martial man to be soft fancy's slave! 200  
True valor still a true respect should have.  
Then my digression is so vile, so base,  
That it will live engraven in my face.

"Yea, though I die, the scandal will survive  
And be an eyesore in my golden coat; 205  
Some loathsome dash the herald will contrive  
To cipher me how fondly I did dote,  
That my posterity, shamed with the note,  
Shall curse my bones and hold it for no sin  
To wish that I their father had not been. 210

“What win I if I gain the thing I seek?  
A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy.  
Who buys a minute’s mirth to wail a week  
Or sells eternity to get a toy?  
For one sweet grape who will the vine destroy? 215  
Or what fond beggar, but to touch the crown,  
Would with the scepter straight be stricken down?”

“If Collatinus dream of my intent,  
Will he not wake and, in a desp’rate rage,  
Post hither this vile purpose to prevent— 220  
This siege, that hath engirt his marriage,  
This blur to youth, this sorrow to the sage,  
This dying virtue, this surviving shame,  
Whose crime will bear an ever-during blame?”

“O, what excuse can my invention make 225  
When thou shalt charge me with so black a deed?  
Will not my tongue be mute, my frail joints shake,  
Mine eyes forgo their light, my false heart bleed?  
The guilt being great, the fear doth still exceed,  
And extreme fear can neither fight nor fly 230  
But cowardlike with trembling terror die.”

“Had Collatinus killed my son or sire  
Or lain in ambush to betray my life,  
Or were he not my dear friend, this desire  
Might have excuse to work upon his wife, 235  
As in revenge or quittal of such strife;  
But as he is my kinsman, my dear friend,  
The shame and fault finds no excuse nor end.”

“Shameful it is: ay, if the fact be known,  
Hateful it is: there is no hate in loving. 240  
I’ll beg her love. But she is not her own.  
The worst is but denial and reproving;  
My will is strong, past reason’s weak removing.  
Who fears a sentence or an old man’s saw  
Shall by a painted cloth be kept in awe.” 245

Thus, graceless, holds he disputation  
’Tween frozen conscience and hot-burning will,  
And with good thoughts makes dispensation,  
Urging the worser sense for vantage still,  
Which in a moment doth confound and kill 250  
All pure effects, and doth so far proceed  
That what is vile shows like a virtuous deed.”

Quoth he, "She took me kindly by the hand  
And gazed for tidings in my eager eyes,  
Fearing some hard news from the warlike band 255  
Where her beloved Collatinus lies.  
O, how her fear did make her color rise!  
First red as roses that on lawn we lay,  
Then white as lawn, the roses took away.

"And how her hand, in my hand being locked, 260  
Forced it to tremble with her loyal fear,  
Which struck her sad, and then it faster rocked  
Until her husband's welfare she did hear,  
Whereat she smiled with so sweet a cheer  
That, had Narcissus seen her as she stood, 265  
Self-love had never drowned him in the flood.

"Why hunt I then for color or excuses?  
All orators are dumb when Beauty pleadeth.  
Poor wretches have remorse in poor abuses;  
Love thrives not in the heart that shadows dreadeth. 270  
Affection is my captain, and he leadeth;  
And when his gaudy banner is displayed,  
The coward fights and will not be dismayed.

"Then, childish fear, avaunt! Debating, die!  
Respect and Reason, wait on wrinkled Age. 275  
My heart shall never countermand mine eye.  
Sad pause and deep regard beseems the sage;  
My part is youth, and beats these from the stage.  
Desire my pilot is, beauty my prize;  
Then who fears sinking where such treasure lies?" 280

As corn o'ergrown by weeds, so heedful fear  
Is almost choked by unresisted lust.  
Away he steals with open list'ning ear,  
Full of foul hope and full of fond mistrust,  
Both which, as servitors to the unjust, 285  
So cross him with their opposite persuasion  
That now he vows a league and now invasion.

Within his thought her heavenly image sits,  
And in the selfsame seat sits Collatine.  
That eye which looks on her confounds his wits; 290  
That eye which him beholds, as more divine,  
Unto a view so false will not incline,  
But with a pure appeal seeks to the heart,  
Which once corrupted takes the worsen part;

And therein heartens up his servile powers, 295

Who, flattered by their leader's jocund show,  
Stuff up his lust, as minutes fill up hours;  
And as their captain, so their pride doth grow,  
Paying more slavish tribute than they owe.  
By reprobate desire thus madly led, 300  
The Roman lord marcheth to Lucrece' bed.

The locks between her chamber and his will,  
Each one by him enforced, retires his ward;  
But, as they open, they all rate his ill,  
Which drives the creeping thief to some regard. 305  
The threshold grates the door to have him heard;  
Night-wand'ring weasels shriek to see him there;  
They fright him, yet he still pursues his fear.

As each unwilling portal yields him way,  
Through little vents and crannies of the place 310  
The wind wars with his torch to make him stay  
And blows the smoke of it into his face,  
Extinguishing his conduct in this case;  
But his hot heart, which fond desire doth scorch,  
Puffs forth another wind that fires the torch. 315

And being lighted, by the light he spies  
Lucretia's glove, wherein her needle sticks.  
He takes it from the rushes where it lies,  
And gripping it, the needle his finger pricks,  
As who should say, "This glove to wanton tricks 320  
Is not inured. Return again in haste.  
Thou seest our mistress' ornaments are chaste."

But all these poor forbiddings could not stay him;  
He in the worst sense consters their denial.  
The doors, the wind, the glove that did delay him 325  
He takes for accidental things of trial,  
Or as those bars which stop the hourly dial,  
Who with a ling'ring stay his course doth let  
Till every minute pays the hour his debt.

"So, so," quoth he, "these lets attend the time 330  
Like little frosts that sometimes threat the spring,  
To add a more rejoicing to the prime  
And give the sneaped birds more cause to sing.  
Pain pays the income of each precious thing:  
Huge rocks, high winds, strong pirates, shelves, and sands 335  
The merchant fears ere rich at home he lands."

Now is he come unto the chamber door  
That shuts him from the heaven of his thought,

Which with a yielding latch, and with no more,  
Hath barred him from the blessed thing he sought. 340  
So from himself impiety hath wrought  
That for his prey to pray he doth begin,  
As if the heavens should countenance his sin.

But in the midst of his unfruitful prayer,  
Having solicited th' eternal power 345  
That his foul thoughts might compass his fair fair,  
And they would stand auspicious to the hour,  
Even there he starts. Quoth he, "I must deflower.  
The powers to whom I pray abhor this fact;  
How can they then assist me in the act? 350

"Then Love and Fortune be my gods, my guide!  
My will is backed with resolution.  
Thoughts are but dreams till their effects be tried.  
The blackest sin is cleared with absolution.  
Against love's fire fear's frost hath dissolution. 355  
The eye of heaven is out, and misty night  
Covers the shame that follows sweet delight."

This said, his guilty hand plucked up the latch,  
And with his knee the door he opens wide.  
The dove sleeps fast that this night-owl will catch. 360  
Thus treason works ere traitors be espied.  
Who sees the lurking serpent steps aside,  
But she, sound sleeping, fearing no such thing,  
Lies at the mercy of his mortal sting.

Into the chamber wickedly he stalks 365  
And gazeth on her yet unstained bed.  
The curtains being close, about he walks,  
Rolling his greedy eyeballs in his head.  
By their high treason is his heart misled,  
Which gives the watchword to his hand full soon 370  
To draw the cloud that hides the silver moon.

Look as the fair and fiery-pointed sun,  
Rushing from forth a cloud, bereaves our sight;  
Even so, the curtain drawn, his eyes begun  
To wink, being blinded with a greater light. 375  
Whether it is that she reflects so bright  
That dazzleth them, or else some shame supposed,  
But blind they are and keep themselves enclosed.

O, had they in that darksome prison died,  
Then had they seen the period of their ill! 380  
Then Collatine again by Lucrece' side

In his clear bed might have reposed still.  
But they must ope, this blessed league to kill,  
And holy-thoughted Lucrece to their sight  
Must sell her joy, her life, her world's delight. 385

Her lily hand her rosy cheek lies under,  
Coz'ning the pillow of a lawful kiss,  
Who, therefore angry, seems to part in sunder,  
Swelling on either side to want his bliss;  
Between whose hills her head entombèd is, 390  
Where like a virtuous monument she lies,  
To be admired of lewd unhallowed eyes.

Without the bed her other fair hand was,  
On the green coverlet, whose perfect white  
Showed like an April daisy on the grass, 395  
With pearly sweat resembling dew of night.  
Her eyes, like marigolds, had sheathed their light  
And, canopied in darkness, sweetly lay  
Till they might open to adorn the day.

Her hair, like golden threads, played with her breath— 400  
O, modest wantons, wanton modesty!—  
Showing life's triumph in the map of death  
And death's dim look in life's mortality.  
Each in her sleep themselves so beautify  
As if between them twain there were no strife, 405  
But that life lived in death and death in life.

Her breasts like ivory globes circled with blue,  
A pair of maiden worlds unconquerèd,  
Save of their lord no bearing yoke they knew,  
And him by oath they truly honorèd. 410  
These worlds in Tarquin new ambition bred,  
Who, like a foul usurper, went about  
From this fair throne to heave the owner out.

What could he see but mightily he noted?  
What did he note but strongly he desired? 415  
What he beheld, on that he firmly doted,  
And in his will his willful eye he tired.  
With more than admiration he admired  
Her azure veins, her alabaster skin,  
Her coral lips, her snow-white dimpled chin. 420

As the grim lion fawneth o'er his prey,  
Sharp hunger by the conquest satisfied,  
So o'er this sleeping soul doth Tarquin stay,  
His rage of lust by gazing qualified—



<p>Slaked, not suppressed; for, standing by her side,  His eye, which late this mutiny restrains,  Unto a greater uproar tempts his veins.</p>	<p>425</p>
<p>And they, like straggling slaves for pillage fighting,  Obdurate vassals fell exploits effecting,  In bloody death and ravishment delighting,  Nor children's tears nor mothers' groans respecting,  Swell in their pride, the onset still expecting.  Anon his beating heart, alarum striking,  Gives the hot charge and bids them do their liking.</p>	<p>430</p>
<p>His drumming heart cheers up his burning eye;  His eye commends the leading to his hand;  His hand, as proud of such a dignity,  Smoking with pride, marched on to make his stand  On her bare breast, the heart of all her land,  Whose ranks of blue veins, as his hand did scale,  Left their round turrets destitute and pale.</p>	<p>435</p> <p>440</p>
<p>They, must'ring to the quiet cabinet  Where their dear governess and lady lies,  Do tell her she is dreadfully beset,  And fright her with confusion of their cries.  She, much amazed, breaks ope her locked-up eyes,  Who, peeping forth this tumult to behold,  Are by his flaming torch dimmed and controlled.</p>	<p>445</p>
<p>Imagine her as one in dead of night  From forth dull sleep by dreadful fancy waking,  That thinks she hath beheld some ghastly sprite,  Whose grim aspect sets every joint a-shaking.  What terror 'tis! But she, in worsè taking,  From sleep disturbèd, heedfully doth view  The sight which makes supposed terror true.</p>	<p>450</p> <p>455</p>
<p>Wrapped and confounded in a thousand fears,  Like to a new-killed bird she trembling lies.  She dares not look; yet, winking, there appears  Quick-shifting antics, ugly in her eyes.  Such shadows are the weak brain's forgeries,  Who, angry that the eyes fly from their lights,  In darkness daunts them with more dreadful sights.</p>	<p>460</p>
<p>His hand, that yet remains upon her breast,  Rude ram to batter such an ivory wall,  May feel her heart, poor citizen, distressed,  Wounding itself to death, rise up and fall,  Beating her bulk, that his hand shakes withal.</p>	<p>465</p>

This moves in him more rage and lesser pity  
To make the breach and enter this sweet city.

First, like a trumpet doth his tongue begin 470  
To sound a parley to his heartless foe,  
Who o'er the white sheet peers her whiter chin  
The reason of this rash alarm to know,  
Which he by dumb demeanor seeks to show.

But she with vehement prayers urgeth still 475  
Under what color he commits this ill.

Thus he replies: "The color in thy face,  
That even for anger makes the lily pale,  
And the red rose blush at her own disgrace,  
Shall plead for me and tell my loving tale. 480  
Under that color am I come to scale  
Thy never-conquered fort; the fault is thine,  
For those thine eyes betray thee unto mine.

"Thus I forestall thee if thou mean to chide:  
Thy beauty hath ensnared thee to this night, 485  
Where thou with patience must my will abide,  
My will that marks thee for my earth's delight,  
Which I to conquer sought with all my might.

But as reproof and reason beat it dead,  
By thy bright beauty was it newly bred. 490

"I see what crosses my attempt will bring;  
I know what thorns the growing rose defends;  
I think the honey guarded with a sting;  
All this beforehand counsel comprehends.  
But will is deaf and hears no heedful friends; 495  
Only he hath an eye to gaze on beauty  
And dotes on what he looks, 'gainst law or duty.

"I have debated, even in my soul,  
What wrong, what shame, what sorrow I shall breed,  
But nothing can affection's course control 500  
Or stop the headlong fury of his speed.  
I know repentant tears ensue the deed,  
Reproach, disdain, and deadly enmity,  
Yet strive I to embrace mine infamy."

This said, he shakes aloft his Roman blade, 505  
Which, like a falcon tow'ring in the skies,  
Coucheth the fowl below with his wings' shade,  
Whose crookèd beak threatens, if he mount, he dies.

So under his insulting falchion lies  
Harmless Lucretia, marking what he tells 510

With trembling fear, as fowl hear falcons' bells.

"Lucrece," quoth he, "this night I must enjoy thee.  
If thou deny, then force must work my way,  
For in thy bed I purpose to destroy thee.

That done, some worthless slave of thine I'll slay, 515  
To kill thine honor with thy life's decay,  
And in thy dead arms do I mean to place him,  
Swearing I slew him, seeing thee embrace him.

"So thy surviving husband shall remain

The scornful mark of every open eye, 520

Thy kinsmen hang their heads at this disdain,

Thy issue blurred with nameless bastardy;

And thou, the author of their obloquy,

Shalt have thy trespass cited up in rhymes

And sung by children in succeeding times. 525

"But if thou yield, I rest thy secret friend.

The fault unknown is as a thought unacted;

A little harm done to a great good end

For lawful policy remains enacted.

The poisonous simple sometimes is compacted 530

In a pure compound; being so applied,

His venom in effect is purified.

"Then, for thy husband and thy children's sake,

Tender my suit. Bequeath not to their lot

The shame that from them no device can take, 535

The blemish that will never be forgot,

Worse than a slavish wipe or birth-hour's blot,

For marks descried in men's nativity

Are nature's faults, not their own infamy."

Here with a cockatrice' dead-killing eye 540

He rouseth up himself and makes a pause,

While she, the picture of pure piety,

Like a white hind under the gripe's sharp claws,

Pleads, in a wilderness where are no laws,

To the rough beast that knows no gentle right 545

Nor aught obeys but his foul appetite.

But when a black-faced cloud the world doth threat,

In his dim mist th' aspiring mountains hiding,

From Earth's dark womb some gentle gust doth get,

Which blow these pitchy vapors from their biding, 550

Hind'ring their present fall by this dividing;

So his unhallowed haste her words delays,

And moody Pluto winks while Orpheus plays.

Yet, foul night-waking cat, he doth but dally,  
 While in his hold-fast foot the weak mouse panteth. 555  
 Her sad behavior feeds his vulture folly,  
 A swallowing gulf that even in plenty wanteth.  
 His ear her prayers admits, but his heart granteth  
     No penetrable entrance to her plaining;  
     Tears harden lust, though marble wear with raining. 560

Her pity-pleading eyes are sadly fixed  
 In the remorseless wrinkles of his face.  
 Her modest eloquence with sighs is mixed,  
 Which to her oratory adds more grace.  
 She puts the period often from his place, 565  
     And midst the sentence so her accent breaks  
     That twice she doth begin ere once she speaks.

She conjures him by high almighty Jove,  
 By knighthood, gentry, and sweet friendship's oath,  
 By her untimely tears, her husband's love, 570  
 By holy human law, and common troth,  
 By heaven and Earth, and all the power of both,  
     That to his borrowed bed he make retire  
     And stoop to honor, not to foul desire.

Quoth she, "Reward not hospitality 575  
 With such black payment as thou hast pretended;  
 Mud not the fountain that gave drink to thee.  
 Mar not the thing that cannot be amended.  
 End thy ill aim before thy shoot be ended;  
     He is no woodman that doth bend his bow 580  
     To strike a poor unseasonable doe.

"My husband is thy friend; for his sake spare me.  
 Thyself art mighty; for thine own sake leave me.  
 Myself a weakling, do not then ensnare me;  
 Thou look'st not like deceit; do not deceive me. 585  
 My sighs, like whirlwinds, labor hence to heave thee.  
     If ever man were moved with woman's moans,  
     Be movèd with my tears, my sighs, my groans,

"All which together, like a troubled ocean,  
 Beat at thy rocky and wrack-threat'ning heart, 590  
 To soften it with their continual motion,  
 For stones dissolved to water do convert.  
 O, if no harder than a stone thou art,  
     Melt at my tears and be compassionate!  
     Soft pity enters at an iron gate. 595

“In Tarquin’s likeness I did entertain thee.  
Hast thou put on his shape to do him shame?  
To all the host of heaven I complain me:  
Thou wrong’st his honor, wound’st his princely name.  
Thou art not what thou seem’st, and if the same, 600  
    Thou seem’st not what thou art, a god, a king;  
    For kings, like gods, should govern everything.

“How will thy shame be seeded in thine age  
When thus thy vices bud before thy spring?  
If in thy hope thou dar’st do such outrage, 605  
What dar’st thou not when once thou art a king?  
O, be remembered, no outrageous thing  
    From vassal actors can be wiped away;  
    Then king’s misdeeds cannot be hid in clay.

“This deed will make thee only loved for fear, 610  
But happy monarchs still are feared for love.  
With foul offenders thou perforce must bear  
When they in thee the like offenses prove.  
If but for fear of this, thy will remove,  
    For princes are the glass, the school, the book, 615  
    Where subjects’ eyes do learn, do read, do look.

“And wilt thou be the school where Lust shall learn?  
Must he in thee read lectures of such shame?  
Wilt thou be glass wherein it shall discern  
Authority for sin, warrant for blame, 620  
To privilege dishonor in thy name?  
    Thou back’st reproach against long-living laud  
    And mak’st fair reputation but a bawd.

“Hast thou command? By Him that gave it thee,  
From a pure heart command thy rebel will. 625  
Draw not thy sword to guard iniquity,  
For it was lent thee all that brood to kill.  
Thy princely office how canst thou fulfill  
    When, patterned by thy fault, foul Sin may say  
    He learned to sin, and thou didst teach the way. 630

“Think but how vile a spectacle it were  
To view thy present trespass in another.  
Men’s faults do seldom to themselves appear;  
Their own transgressions partially they smother.  
This guilt would seem death-worthy in thy brother. 635  
    O, how are they wrapped in with infamies  
    That from their own misdeeds askance their eyes!

“To thee, to thee, my heaved-up hands appeal,

Not to seducing lust, thy rash relier.  
I sue for exiled majesty's repeal; 640  
Let him return, and flatt'ring thoughts retire.  
His true respect will prison false desire  
And wipe the dim mist from thy doting eyne,  
That thou shalt see thy state and pity mine."

"Have done," quoth he. "My uncontrollèd tide 645  
Turns not, but swells the higher by this let.  
Small lights are soon blown out; huge fires abide,  
And with the wind in greater fury fret.  
The petty streams that pay a daily debt  
To their salt sovereign with their fresh falls' haste 650  
Add to his flow but alter not his taste."

"Thou art," quoth she, "a sea, a sovereign king,  
And, lo, there falls into thy boundless flood  
Black lust, dishonor, shame, misgoverning,  
Who seek to stain the ocean of thy blood. 655  
If all these petty ills shall change thy good,  
Thy sea within a puddle's womb is hearsed,  
And not the puddle in thy sea dispersed.

"So shall these slaves be king, and thou their slave;  
Thou nobly base, they basely dignified; 660  
Thou their fair life, and they thy fouler grave;  
Thou loathèd in their shame, they in thy pride.  
The lesser thing should not the greater hide;  
The cedar stoops not to the base shrub's foot,  
But low shrubs wither at the cedar's root. 665

"So let thy thoughts, low vassals to thy state—"  
"No more," quoth he. "By heaven, I will not hear thee.  
Yield to my love. If not, enforcèd hate,  
Instead of love's coy touch, shall rudely tear thee.  
That done, despitefully I mean to bear thee 670  
Unto the base bed of some rascal groom,  
To be thy partner in this shameful doom."

This said, he sets his foot upon the light,  
For light and lust are deadly enemies.  
Shame folded up in blind concealing night, 675  
When most unseen, then most doth tyrannize.  
The wolf hath seized his prey; the poor lamb cries,  
Till, with her own white fleece her voice controlled,  
Entombs her outcry in her lips' sweet fold.

For with the nightly linen that she wears 680  
He pens her piteous clamors in her head,

Cooling his hot face in the chastest tears  
That ever modest eyes with sorrow shed.  
O, that prone lust should stain so pure a bed!  
The spots whereof could weeping purify, 685  
Her tears should drop on them perpetually.

But she hath lost a dearer thing than life,  
And he hath won what he would lose again.  
This forcèd league doth force a further strife;  
This momentary joy breeds months of pain; 690  
This hot desire converts to cold disdain.  
Pure Chastity is rifled of her store,  
And Lust, the thief, far poorer than before.

Look as the full-fed hound or gorgèd hawk,  
Unapt for tender smell or speedy flight, 695  
Make slow pursuit, or altogether balk  
The prey wherein by nature they delight;  
So surfeit-taking Tarquin fares this night.  
His taste delicious, in digestion souring,  
Devours his will, that lived by foul devouring. 700

O, deeper sin than bottomless conceit  
Can comprehend in still imagination!  
Drunken Desire must vomit his receipt  
Ere he can see his own abomination.  
While Lust is in his pride, no exclamation 705  
Can curb his heat or rein his rash desire,  
Till, like a jade, Self-will himself doth tire.

And then with lank and lean discolored cheek,  
With heavy eye, knit brow, and strengthless pace,  
Feeble Desire, all recreant, poor, and meek, 710  
Like to a bankrout beggar wails his case.  
The flesh being proud, Desire doth fight with Grace,  
For there it revels; and when that decays,  
The guilty rebel for remission prays.

So fares it with this faultful lord of Rome, 715  
Who this accomplishment so hotly chased,  
For now against himself he sounds this doom,  
That through the length of times he stands disgraced.  
Besides, his soul's fair temple is defaced,  
To whose weak ruins muster troops of cares 720  
To ask the spotted princess how she fares.

She says her subjects with foul insurrection  
Have battered down her consecrated wall  
And, by their mortal fault, brought in subjection

Her immortality, and made her thrall 725  
To living death and pain perpetual,  
Which in her prescience she controllèd still,  
But her foresight could not forestall their will.

E'en in this thought through the dark night he stealeth,  
A captive victor that hath lost in gain, 730  
Bearing away the wound that nothing healeth,  
The scar that will, despite of cure, remain,  
Leaving his spoil perplexed in greater pain.  
She bears the load of lust he left behind,  
And he the burden of a guilty mind. 735

He like a thievish dog creeps sadly thence;  
She like a wearied lamb lies panting there.  
He scowls and hates himself for his offense;  
She, desperate, with her nails her flesh doth tear.  
He faintly flies, sweating with guilty fear; 740  
She stays, exclaiming on the direful night;  
He runs and chides his vanished, loathed delight.

He thence departs a heavy convertite;  
She there remains a hopeless castaway.  
He in his speed looks for the morning light; 745  
She prays she never may behold the day.  
“For day,” quoth she, “night’s scapes doth open lay,  
And my true eyes have never practiced how  
To cloak offenses with a cunning brow.

“They think not but that every eye can see 750  
The same disgrace which they themselves behold,  
And therefore would they still in darkness be,  
To have their unseen sin remain untold.  
For they their guilt with weeping will unfold,  
And grave, like water that doth eat in steel, 755  
Upon my cheeks what helpless shame I feel.”

Here she exclaims against repose and rest  
And bids her eyes hereafter still be blind.  
She wakes her heart by beating on her breast,  
And bids it leap from thence, where it may find 760  
Some purer chest to close so pure a mind.  
Frantic with grief thus breathes she forth her spite  
Against the unseen secrecy of night.

“O, comfort-killing Night, image of hell,  
Dim register and notary of shame, 765  
Black stage for tragedies and murders fell,  
Vast sin-concealing chaos, nurse of blame,



Blind muffled bawd, dark harbor for defame, Grim cave of death, whisp'ring conspirator With close-tongued treason and the ravisher!	770
“O, hateful, vaporous, and foggy Night, Since thou art guilty of my cureless crime, Muster thy mists to meet the eastern light, Make war against proportioned course of time; Or, if thou wilt permit the sun to climb His wonted height, yet ere he go to bed, Knit poisonous clouds about his golden head.	775
“With rotten damps ravish the morning air; Let their exhaled unwholesome breaths make sick The life of purity, the supreme fair, Ere he arrive his weary noontide prick, And let thy musty vapors march so thick That in their smoky ranks his smothered light May set at noon and make perpetual night.	780
“Were Tarquin Night, as he is but Night's child, The silver-shining queen he would distain; Her twinkling handmaids too, by him defiled, Through Night's black bosom should not peep again. So should I have copartners in my pain, And fellowship in woe doth woe assuage, As palmers' chat makes short their pilgrimage.	785 790
“Where now I have no one to blush with me, To cross their arms and hang their heads with mine, To mask their brows and hide their infamy, But I alone alone must sit and pine, Seasoning the earth with showers of silver brine, Mingling my talk with tears, my grief with groans, Poor wasting monuments of lasting moans.	795
“O Night, thou furnace of foul reeking smoke, Let not the jealous Day behold that face Which underneath thy black all-hiding cloak Immodestly lies martyred with disgrace! Keep still possession of thy gloomy place, That all the faults which in thy reign are made May likewise be sepulchered in thy shade.	800 805
“Make me not object to the telltale Day. The light will show characterized in my brow The story of sweet chastity's decay, The impious breach of holy wedlock vow. Yea, the illiterate, that know not how	810

To cipher what is writ in learned books,  
Will quote my loathsome trespass in my looks.

“The nurse, to still her child, will tell my story  
And fright her crying babe with Tarquin’s name.  
The orator, to deck his oratory, 815  
Will couple my reproach to Tarquin’s shame.  
Feast-finding minstrels, tuning my defame,  
Will tie the hearers to attend each line,  
How Tarquin wrongèd me, I Collatine.

“Let my good name, that senseless reputation, 820  
For Collatine’s dear love be kept unspotted.  
If that be made a theme for disputation,  
The branches of another root are rotted  
And undeserved reproach to him allotted  
That is as clear from this attain of mine 825  
As I, ere this, was pure to Collatine.

“O unseen shame, invisible disgrace!  
O unfelt sore, crest-wounding private scar!  
Reproach is stamped in Collatinus’ face,  
And Tarquin’s eye may read the mot afar, 830  
How he in peace is wounded, not in war.  
Alas, how many bear such shameful blows,  
Which not themselves but he that gives them knows!

“If, Collatine, thine honor lay in me,  
From me by strong assault it is bereft; 835  
My honey lost, and I, a drone-like bee,  
Have no perfection of my summer left,  
But robbed and ransacked by injurious theft.  
In thy weak hive a wand’ring wasp hath crept  
And sucked the honey which thy chaste bee kept. 840

“Yet am I guilty of thy honor’s wrack;  
Yet for thy honor did I entertain him.  
Coming from thee, I could not put him back,  
For it had been dishonor to disdain him.  
Besides, of weariness he did complain him 845  
And talked of virtue. O, unlooked-for evil,  
When virtue is profaned in such a devil!

“Why should the worm intrude the maiden bud?  
Or hateful cuckoos hatch in sparrows’ nests?  
Or toads infect fair founts with venom mud? 850  
Or tyrant folly lurk in gentle breasts?  
Or kings be breakers of their own behests?  
But no perfection is so absolute

That some impurity doth not pollute.

“The agèd man that coffers up his gold 855  
Is plagued with cramps and gouts and painful fits  
And scarce hath eyes his treasure to behold,  
But like still-pining Tantalus he sits,  
And useless barns the harvest of his wits,  
Having no other pleasure of his gain 860  
But torment that it cannot cure his pain.

“So then he hath it when he cannot use it  
And leaves it to be mastered by his young,  
Who in their pride do presently abuse it.  
Their father was too weak and they too strong 865  
To hold their cursèd-blessèd fortune long.  
The sweets we wish for turn to loathèd sours  
Even in the moment that we call them ours.

“Unruly blasts wait on the tender spring;  
Unwholesome weeds take root with precious flowers; 870  
The adder hisses where the sweet birds sing;  
What Virtue breeds Iniquity devours.  
We have no good that we can say is ours  
But ill-annexèd Opportunity  
Or kills his life or else his quality. 875

“O Opportunity, thy guilt is great!  
'Tis thou that execut'st the traitor's treason;  
Thou sets the wolf where he the lamb may get;  
Whoever plots the sin, thou 'point'st the season.  
'Tis thou that spurn'st at right, at law, at reason, 880  
And in thy shady cell, where none may spy him,  
Sits Sin, to seize the souls that wander by him.

“Thou makest the vestal violate her oath;  
Thou blowest the fire when temperance is thawed;  
Thou smother'st honesty, thou murd'rest troth. 885  
Thou foul abettor, thou notorious bawd,  
Thou plantest scandal and displacest laud.  
Thou ravisher, thou traitor, thou false thief,  
Thy honey turns to gall, thy joy to grief.

“Thy secret pleasure turns to open shame, 890  
Thy private feasting to a public fast,  
Thy smoothing titles to a raggèd name,  
Thy sugared tongue to bitter wormwood taste.  
Thy violent vanities can never last.  
How comes it, then, vile Opportunity, 895  
Being so bad, such numbers seek for thee?

“When wilt thou be the humble suppliant’s friend  
And bring him where his suit may be obtained?  
When wilt thou sort an hour great strifes to end,  
Or free that soul which wretchedness hath chained, 900  
Give physic to the sick, ease to the pained?  
The poor, lame, blind, halt, creep, cry out for thee,  
But they ne’er meet with Opportunity.

“The patient dies while the physician sleeps;  
The orphan pines while the oppressor feeds; 905  
Justice is feasting while the widow weeps;  
Advice is sporting while infection breeds.  
Thou grant’st no time for charitable deeds.  
Wrath, envy, treason, rape, and murder’s rages,  
Thy heinous hours wait on them as their pages. 910

“When Truth and Virtue have to do with thee,  
A thousand crosses keep them from thy aid.  
They buy thy help, but Sin ne’er gives a fee;  
He gratis comes, and thou art well apaid  
As well to hear as grant what he hath said. 915  
My Collatine would else have come to me  
When Tarquin did, but he was stayed by thee.

“Guilty thou art of murder and of theft,  
Guilty of perjury and subornation,  
Guilty of treason, forgery, and shift, 920  
Guilty of incest, that abomination—  
An accessory by thine inclination  
To all sins past and all that are to come,  
From the creation to the general doom.

“Misshapen Time, copesmate of ugly Night, 925  
Swift subtle post, carrier of grisly care,  
Eater of youth, false slave to false delight,  
Base watch of woes, sin’s packhorse, virtue’s snare!  
Thou nursest all and murd’rest all that are.  
O, hear me, then, injurious, shifting Time! 930  
Be guilty of my death, since of my crime.

“Why hath thy servant Opportunity  
Betrayed the hours thou gav’st me to repose,  
Canceled my fortunes, and enchained me  
To endless date of never-ending woes? 935  
Time’s office is to fine the hate of foes,  
To eat up errors by opinion bred,  
Not spend the dowry of a lawful bed.

<p> “Time’s glory is to calm contending kings,  To unmask falsehood and bring truth to light,  To stamp the seal of time in agèd things,  To wake the morn and sentinel the night,  To wrong the wronger till he render right,      To ruate proud buildings with thy hours      And smear with dust their glitt’ring golden towers,</p>	<p>940</p> <p>945</p>
<p> “To fill with worm-holes stately monuments,  To feed oblivion with decay of things,  To blot old books and alter their contents,  To pluck the quills from ancient ravens’ wings,  To dry the old oak’s sap and cherish springs,      To spoil antiquities of hammered steel      And turn the giddy round of Fortune’s wheel,</p>	<p>950</p>
<p> “To show the beldam daughters of her daughter,  To make the child a man, the man a child,  To slay the tiger that doth live by slaughter,  To tame the unicorn and lion wild,  To mock the subtle in themselves beguiled,      To cheer the plowman with increaseful crops      And waste huge stones with little water drops.</p>	<p>955</p>
<p> “Why work’st thou mischief in thy pilgrimage,  Unless thou couldst return to make amends?  One poor retiring minute in an age  Would purchase thee a thousand thousand friends,  Lending him wit that to bad debtors lends.      O this dread night, wouldst thou one hour come back,      I could prevent this storm and shun thy wrack!</p>	<p>960</p> <p>965</p>
<p> “Thou ceaseless lackey to Eternity,  With some mischance cross Tarquin in his flight.  Devise extremes beyond extremity  To make him curse this cursèd crimeful night.  Let ghastly shadows his lewd eyes affright,      And the dire thought of his committed evil      Shape every bush a hideous shapeless devil.</p>	<p>970</p>
<p> “Disturb his hours of rest with restless trances.  Afflict him in his bed with bedrid groans.  Let there bechance him pitiful mischances  To make him moan, but pity not his moans.  Stone him with hard’ned hearts harder than stones,      And let mild women to him lose their mildness,      Wilder to him than tigers in their wildness.</p>	<p>975</p> <p>980</p>
<p> “Let him have time to tear his curlèd hair,</p>	

Let him have time against himself to rave, Let him have time of Time's help to despair, Let him have time to live a loathèd slave, Let him have time a beggar's orts to crave	985
And time to see one that by alms doth live Disdain to him disdainèd scraps to give.	
 "Let him have time to see his friends his foes, And merry fools to mock at him resort. Let him have time to mark how slow time goes In time of sorrow, and how swift and short His time of folly and his time of sport; And ever let his unrecalling crime Have time to wail th'abusing of his time.	 990
 "O Time, thou tutor both to good and bad, Teach me to curse him that thou taught'st this ill! At his own shadow let the thief run mad, Himself himself seek every hour to kill. Such wretched hands such wretched blood should spill, For who so base would such an office have As sland'rous deathsman to so base a slave?	 995  1000
 "The baser is he, coming from a king, To shame his hope with deeds degenerate. The mightier man, the mightier is the thing That makes him honored or begets him hate; For greatest scandal waits on greatest state. The moon being clouded presently is missed, But little stars may hide them when they list.	 1005
 "The crow may bathe his coal-black wings in mire And unperceived fly with the filth away, But if the like the snow-white swan desire, The stain upon his silver down will stay. Poor grooms are sightless night, kings glorious day. Gnats are unnoted wheresoe'er they fly, But eagles gazed upon with every eye.	 1010  1015
 "Out, idle words, servants to shallow fools, Unprofitable sounds, weak arbitrators! Busy yourselves in skill-contending schools; Debate where leisure serves with dull debaters; To trembling clients be you mediators. For me, I force not argument a straw, Since that my case is past the help of law.	 1020
 "In vain I rail at Opportunity, At Time, at Tarquin, and uncheerful Night.	

In vain I cavil with mine infamy. 1025  
In vain I spurn at my confirmed despite.  
This helpless smoke of words doth me no right.  
The remedy indeed to do me good  
Is to let forth my foul defilèd blood.

“Poor hand, why quiver’st thou at this decree? 1030  
Honor thyself to rid me of this shame,  
For if I die, my honor lives in thee,  
But if I live, thou liv’st in my defame;  
Since thou couldst not defend thy loyal dame  
And wast affeard to scratch her wicked foe, 1035  
Kill both thyself and her for yielding so.”

This said, from her betumbled couch she starteth,  
To find some desp’rate instrument of death,  
But this, no slaughterhouse, no tool imparteth  
To make more vent for passage of her breath, 1040  
Which, thronging through her lips, so vanisheth  
As smoke from Etna, that in air consumes,  
Or that which from dischargèd cannon fumes.

“In vain,” quoth she, “I live, and seek in vain  
Some happy mean to end a hapless life. 1045  
I feared by Tarquin’s falchion to be slain,  
Yet for the selfsame purpose seek a knife.  
But when I feared, I was a loyal wife;  
So am I now.—O no, that cannot be!  
Of that true type hath Tarquin rifled me. 1050

“O, that is gone for which I sought to live,  
And therefore now I need not fear to die.  
To clear this spot by death, at least I give  
A badge of fame to slander’s livery,  
A dying life to living infamy. 1055  
Poor helpless help, the treasure stol’n away,  
To burn the guiltless casket where it lay!

“Well, well, dear Collatine, thou shalt not know  
The stainèd taste of violated troth;  
I will not wrong thy true affection so 1060  
To flatter thee with an infringèd oath.  
This bastard graff shall never come to growth;  
He shall not boast who did thy stock pollute  
That thou art doting father of his fruit.

“Nor shall he smile at thee in secret thought, 1065  
Nor laugh with his companions at thy state,  
But thou shalt know thy int’reast was not bought

Basely with gold, but stol'n from forth thy gate.  
For me, I am the mistress of my fate  
    And with my trespass never will dispense 1070  
    Till life to death acquit my forced offense.

“I will not poison thee with my attaint,  
Nor fold my fault in cleanly coined excuses;  
My sable ground of sin I will not paint  
To hide the truth of this false night's abuses. 1075  
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.”

By this, lamenting Philomel had ended  
The well-tuned warble of her nightly sorrow, 1080  
And solemn night with slow sad gait descended  
To ugly hell, when, lo, the blushing morrow  
Lends light to all fair eyes that light will borrow.  
    But cloudy Lucrece shames herself to see  
    And therefore still in night would cloistered be. 1085

Revealing day through every cranny spies  
And seems to point her out where she sits weeping,  
To whom she sobbing speaks: “O eye of eyes,  
Why pry'st thou through my window? Leave thy peeping.  
Mock with thy tickling beams eyes that are sleeping. 1090  
    Brand not my forehead with thy piercing light,  
    For day hath naught to do what's done by night.”

Thus cavils she with everything she sees.  
True grief is fond and testy as a child,  
Who, wayward once, his mood with naught agrees. 1095  
Old woes, not infant sorrows, bear them mild:  
Continuance tames the one; the other, wild,  
    Like an unpracticed swimmer plunging still  
    With too much labor drowns for want of skill.

So she, deep drenchèd in a sea of care, 1100  
Holds disputation with each thing she views  
And to herself all sorrow doth compare;  
No object but her passion's strength renews,  
And as one shifts, another straight ensues.  
    Sometimes her grief is dumb and hath no words; 1105  
    Sometimes 'tis mad and too much talk affords.

The little birds that tune their morning's joy  
Make her moans mad with their sweet melody,  
For mirth doth search the bottom of annoy;  
Sad souls are slain in merry company. 1110



Grief best is pleased with grief's society;  
True sorrow then is feelingly sufficed  
When with like semblance it is sympathized.

'Tis double death to drown in ken of shore;  
He ten times pines that pines beholding food; 1115  
To see the salve doth make the wound ache more;  
Great grief grieves most at that would do it good.

Deep woes roll forward like a gentle flood,  
Who, being stopped, the bounding banks o'erflows;  
Grief dallied with nor law nor limit knows. 1120

"You mocking birds," quoth she, "your tunes entomb  
Within your hollow-swelling feathered breasts,  
And in my hearing be you mute and dumb;  
My restless discord loves no stops nor rests. 1125  
A woeful hostess brooks not merry guests.  
Relish your nimble notes to pleasing ears;  
Distress likes dumps when time is kept with tears.

"Come, Philomel, that sing'st of ravishment,  
Make thy sad grove in my disheveled hair.  
As the dank earth weeps at thy languishment, 1130  
So I at each sad strain will strain a tear  
And with deep groans the diapason bear;  
For burden-wise I'll hum on Tarquin still,  
While thou on Tereus descants better skill.

"And whiles against a thorn thou bear'st thy part 1135  
To keep thy sharp woes waking, wretched I,  
To imitate thee well, against my heart  
Will fix a sharp knife to affright mine eye,  
Who if it wink shall thereon fall and die.  
These means, as frets upon an instrument, 1140  
Shall tune our heartstrings to true languishment.

"And for, poor bird, thou sing'st not in the day,  
As shaming any eye should thee behold,  
Some dark, deep desert seated from the way,  
That knows not parching heat nor freezing cold, 1145  
Will we find out, and there we will unfold  
To creatures stern sad tunes to change their kinds.  
Since men prove beasts, let beasts bear gentle minds."

As the poor frightened deer that stands at gaze,  
Wildly determining which way to fly, 1150  
Or one encompassed with a winding maze,  
That cannot tread the way out readily,  
So with herself is she in mutiny,

To live or die which of the twain were better  
When life is shamed and death reproach's debtor. 1155

"To kill myself," quoth she, "alack, what were it  
But with my body my poor soul's pollution?  
They that lose half with greater patience bear it  
Than they whose whole is swallowed in confusion.  
That mother tries a merciless conclusion 1160  
Who, having two sweet babes, when death takes one,  
Will slay the other and be nurse to none.

"My body or my soul, which was the dearer  
When the one pure, the other made divine?  
Whose love of either to myself was nearer 1165  
When both were kept for heaven and Collatine?  
Ay me, the bark pill'd from the lofty pine,  
His leaves will wither and his sap decay;  
So must my soul, her bark being pill'd away.

"Her house is sacked, her quiet interrupted, 1170  
Her mansion battered by the enemy,  
Her sacred temple spotted, spoiled, corrupted,  
Grossly engirt with daring infamy.

Then let it not be called impiety  
If in this blemished fort I make some hole 1175  
Through which I may convey this troubled soul.

"Yet die I will not till my Collatine  
Have heard the cause of my untimely death,  
That he may vow, in that sad hour of mine,  
Revenge on him that made me stop my breath. 1180  
My stained blood to Tarquin I'll bequeath,  
Which, by him tainted, shall for him be spent,  
And as his due writ in my testament.

"My honor I'll bequeath unto the knife  
That wounds my body so dishonorèd. 1185  
'Tis honor to deprive dishonorèd life;  
The one will live, the other being dead.  
So of shame's ashes shall my fame be bred,  
For in my death I murder shameful scorn;  
My shame so dead, mine honor is new born. 1190

"Dear lord of that dear jewel I have lost,  
What legacy shall I bequeath to thee?  
My resolution, love, shall be thy boast,  
By whose example thou revenged mayst be.  
How Tarquin must be used, read it in me; 1195  
Myself, thy friend, will kill myself, thy foe,

And for my sake serve thou false Tarquin so.

“This brief abridgement of my will I make:  
My soul and body to the skies and ground;  
My resolution, husband, do thou take; 1200  
Mine honor be the knife’s that makes my wound;  
My shame be his that did my fame confound;  
And all my fame that lives disbursèd be  
To those that live and think no shame of me.

“Thou, Collatine, shalt oversee this will; 1205  
How was I overseen that thou shalt see it!  
My blood shall wash the slander of mine ill;  
My life’s foul deed my life’s fair end shall free it.  
Faint not, faint heart, but stoutly say, ‘So be it.’  
Yield to my hand; my hand shall conquer thee. 1210  
Thou dead, both die, and both shall victors be.”

This plot of death when sadly she had laid,  
And wiped the brinish pearl from her bright eyes,  
With untuned tongue she hoarsely calls her maid,  
Whose swift obedience to her mistress hies, 1215  
For fleet-winged duty with thought’s feathers flies.  
Poor Lucrece’ cheeks unto her maid seem so  
As winter meads when sun doth melt their snow.

Her mistress she doth give demure good morrow  
With soft slow tongue, true mark of modesty, 1220  
And sorts a sad look to her lady’s sorrow,  
Forwhy her face wore sorrow’s livery,  
But durst not ask of her audaciously  
Why her two suns were cloud-eclipsèd so,  
Nor why her fair cheeks over-washed with woe. 1225

But as the earth doth weep, the sun being set,  
Each flower moistened like a melting eye,  
Even so the maid with swelling drops gan wet  
Her circled eyne, enforced by sympathy  
Of those fair suns set in her mistress’ sky, 1230  
Who in a salt-waved ocean quench their light,  
Which makes the maid weep like the dewy night.

A pretty while these pretty creatures stand  
Like ivory conduits coral cisterns filling.  
One justly weeps; the other takes in hand 1235  
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.

For men have marble, women waxen, minds,	1240
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	1245
Wherein is stamped the semblance of a devil.	
Their smoothness, like a goodly champaign plain,	
Lays open all the little worms that creep;	
In men, as in a rough-grown grove, remain	
Cave-keeping evils that obscurely sleep.	1250
Through crystal walls each little mote will peep.	
Though men can cover crimes with bold stern looks,	
Poor women's faces are their own faults' books.	
No man inveigh against the withered flower,	
But chide rough winter that the flower hath killed.	1255
Not that devoured, but that which doth devour,	
Is worthy blame. O, let it not be hild	
Poor women's faults that they are so fulfilled	
With men's abuses. Those proud lords, to blame,	
Make weak-made women tenants to their shame.	1260
The precedent whereof in Lucrece view,	
Assailed by night with circumstances strong	
Of present death, and shame that might ensue	
By that her death, to do her husband wrong.	
Such danger to resistance did belong	1265
That dying fear through all her body spread,	
And who cannot abuse a body dead?	
By this, mild patience bid fair Lucrece speak	
To the poor counterfeit of her complaining:	
“My girl,” quoth she, “on what occasion break	1270
Those tears from thee, that down thy cheeks are raining?	
If thou dost weep for grief of my sustaining,	
Know, gentle wench, it small avails my mood.	
If tears could help, mine own would do me good.	
“But tell me, girl, when went”—and there she stayed	1275
Till after a deep groan—“Tarquin from hence?”	
“Madam, ere I was up,” replied the maid,	
“The more to blame my sluggard negligence.	
Yet with the fault I thus far can dispense:	
Myself was stirring ere the break of day,	1280
And, ere I rose, was Tarquin gone away.	

“But, lady, if your maid may be so bold,  
She would request to know your heaviness.”  
“O, peace!” quoth Lucrece. “If it should be told,  
The repetition cannot make it less, 1285  
For more it is than I can well express,  
And that deep torture may be called a hell  
When more is felt than one hath power to tell.

“Go, get me hither paper, ink, and pen.  
Yet save that labor, for I have them here.— 1290  
What should I say?—One of my husband’s men  
Bid thou be ready by and by to bear  
A letter to my lord, my love, my dear.  
Bid him with speed prepare to carry it;  
The cause craves haste, and it will soon be writ.” 1295

Her maid is gone, and she prepares to write,  
First hovering o’er the paper with her quill.  
Conceit and grief an eager combat fight;  
What wit sets down is blotted straight with will;  
This is too curious-good, this blunt and ill. 1300  
Much like a press of people at a door  
Throng her inventions, which shall go before.

At last she thus begins: “Thou worthy lord  
Of that unworthy wife that greeteth thee,  
Health to thy person. Next, vouchsafe t’ afford, 1305  
If ever, love, thy Lucrece thou wilt see,  
Some present speed to come and visit me.  
So I commend me from our house in grief.  
My woes are tedious, though my words are brief.”

Here folds she up the tenor of her woe, 1310  
Her certain sorrow writ uncertainly.  
By this short schedule Collatine may know  
Her grief, but not her grief’s true quality.  
She dares not thereof make discovery  
Lest he should hold it her own gross abuse 1315  
Ere she with blood had stained her stained excuse.

Besides, the life and feeling of her passion  
She hoards to spend when he is by to hear her,  
When sighs and groans and tears may grace the fashion  
Of her disgrace, the better so to clear her 1320  
From that suspicion which the world might bear her.  
To shun this blot, she would not blot the letter  
With words till action might become them better.

To see sad sights moves more than hear them told,

For then the eye interprets to the ear 1325  
The heavy motion that it doth behold  
When every part a part of woe doth bear.  
'Tis but a part of sorrow that we hear.

Deep sounds make lesser noise than shallow fords,  
And sorrow ebbs, being blown with wind of words. 1330

Her letter now is sealed, and on it writ,  
"At Ardea to my lord with more than haste."  
The post attends, and she delivers it,  
Charging the sour-faced groom to hie as fast  
As lagging fowls before the northern blast. 1335

Speed more than speed but dull and slow she deems;  
Extremity still urgeth such extremes.

The homely villain curtsies to her low  
And, blushing on her with a steadfast eye,  
Receives the scroll without or yea or no, 1340  
And forth with bashful innocence doth hie.  
But they whose guilt within their bosoms lie

Imagine every eye beholds their blame,  
For Lucrece thought he blushed to see her shame,

When, silly groom, God wot, it was defect 1345  
Of spirit, life, and bold audacity.  
Such harmless creatures have a true respect  
To talk in deeds, while others saucily  
Promise more speed but do it leisurely.

Even so this pattern of the worn-out age 1350  
Pawnd honest looks, but laid no words to gage.

His kindled duty kindled her mistrust,  
That two red fires in both their faces blazed.  
She thought he blushed as knowing Tarquin's lust  
And, blushing with him, wistly on him gazed. 1355  
Her earnest eye did make him more amazed.

The more she saw the blood his cheeks replenish,  
The more she thought he spied in her some blemish.

But long she thinks till he return again,  
And yet the duteous vassal scarce is gone. 1360  
The weary time she cannot entertain,  
For now 'tis stale to sigh, to weep, and groan;  
So woe hath wearied woe, moan tirèd moan,

That she her plaints a little while doth stay,  
Pausing for means to mourn some newer way. 1365

At last she calls to mind where hangs a piece  
Of skillful painting, made for Priam's Troy,

Before the which is drawn the power of Greece,  
For Helen's rape the city to destroy,  
Threat'ning cloud-kissing Ilion with annoy, 1370  
    Which the conceited painter drew so proud  
    As heaven, it seemed, to kiss the turrets bowed.

A thousand lamentable objects there,  
In scorn of Nature, Art gave lifeless life.  
Many a dry drop seemed a weeping tear 1375  
Shed for the slaughtered husband by the wife.  
The red blood reeked to show the painter's strife,  
    And dying eyes gleamed forth their ashy lights  
    Like dying coals burnt out in tedious nights.

There might you see the laboring pioneer 1380  
Begrimed with sweat and smearèd all with dust,  
And from the towers of Troy there would appear  
The very eyes of men through loop-holes thrust,  
Gazing upon the Greeks with little lust.  
    Such sweet observance in this work was had 1385  
    That one might see those far-off eyes look sad.

In great commanders grace and majesty  
You might behold, triumphing in their faces;  
In youth, quick bearing and dexterity;  
And here and there the painter interlaces 1390  
Pale cowards marching on with trembling paces,  
    Which heartless peasants did so well resemble  
    That one would swear he saw them quake and tremble.

In Ajax and Ulysses, O, what art  
Of physiognomy might one behold! 1395  
The face of either ciphered either's heart,  
Their face their manners most expressly told.  
In Ajax' eyes blunt rage and rigor rolled,  
    But the mild glance that sly Ulysses lent  
    Showed deep regard and smiling government. 1400

There pleading might you see grave Nestor stand,  
As 'twere encouraging the Greeks to fight,  
Making such sober action with his hand  
That it beguiled attention, charmed the sight.  
In speech, it seemed, his beard, all silver white, 1405  
    Wagged up and down, and from his lips did fly  
    Thin winding breath, which purred up to the sky.

About him were a press of gaping faces,  
Which seemed to swallow up his sound advice,  
All jointly list'ning, but with several graces, 1410

As if some mermaid did their ears entice;  
Some high, some low, the painter was so nice.  
The scalps of many, almost hid behind,  
To jump up higher seemed, to mock the mind.

Here one man's hand leaned on another's head, 1415  
His nose being shadowed by his neighbor's ear;  
Here one being thronged bears back, all boll'n and red;  
Another, smothered, seems to pelt and swear;  
And in their rage such signs of rage they bear  
As, but for loss of Nestor's golden words, 1420  
It seemed they would debate with angry swords.

For much imaginary work was there,  
Conceit deceitful, so compact, so kind,  
That for Achilles' image stood his spear  
Gripped in an armèd hand; himself, behind, 1425  
Was left unseen, save to the eye of mind.  
A hand, a foot, a face, a leg, a head,  
Stood for the whole to be imaginèd.

And from the walls of strong-besiegèd Troy,  
When their brave hope, bold Hector, marched to field, 1430  
Stood many Trojan mothers, sharing joy  
To see their youthful sons bright weapons wield,  
And to their hope they such odd action yield  
That through their light joy seemèd to appear,  
Like bright things stained, a kind of heavy fear. 1435

And from the strand of Dardan, where they fought,  
To Simois' reedy banks the red blood ran,  
Whose waves to imitate the battle sought  
With swelling ridges, and their ranks began  
To break upon the gallèd shore, and then 1440  
Retire again till, meeting greater ranks,  
They join and shoot their foam at Simois' banks.

To this well-painted piece is Lucrece come  
To find a face where all distress is stelled.  
Many she sees where cares have carvèd some, 1445  
But none where all distress and dolor dwelled,  
Till she despairing Hecuba beheld,  
Staring on Priam's wounds with her old eyes,  
Which bleeding under Pyrrhus' proud foot lies.

In her the painter had anatomized 1450  
Time's ruin, beauty's wrack, and grim care's reign.  
Her cheeks with chaps and wrinkles were disguised;  
Of what she was no semblance did remain.



Her blue blood, changed to black in every vein, Wanting the spring that those shrunk pipes had fed, Showed life imprisoned in a body dead.	1455
On this sad shadow Lucrece spends her eyes, And shapes her sorrow to the beldam's woes, Who nothing wants to answer her but cries And bitter words to ban her cruel foes.	1460
The painter was no god to lend her those, And therefore Lucrece swears he did her wrong To give her so much grief and not a tongue.	
“Poor instrument,” quoth she, “without a sound, I'll tune thy woes with my lamenting tongue, And drop sweet balm in Priam's painted wound, And rail on Pyrrhus, that hath done him wrong, And with my tears quench Troy, that burns so long, And with my knife scratch out the angry eyes Of all the Greeks that are thine enemies.	1465     1470
“Show me the strumpet that began this stir, That with my nails her beauty I may tear. Thy heat of lust, fond Paris, did incur This load of wrath that burning Troy doth bear; Thy eye kindled the fire that burneth here, And here in Troy, for trespass of thine eye, The sire, the son, the dame, and daughter die.	1475
“Why should the private pleasure of some one Become the public plague of many moe? Let sin, alone committed, light alone Upon his head that hath transgressèd so; Let guiltless souls be freed from guilty woe. For one's offense why should so many fall, To plague a private sin in general?”	1480
“Lo, here weeps Hecuba, here Priam dies, Here manly Hector faints, here Troilus swoonds, Here friend by friend in bloody channel lies, And friend to friend gives unadvisèd wounds, And one man's lust these many lives confounds. Had doting Priam checked his son's desire, Troy had been bright with fame and not with fire.”	1485     1490
Here feelingly she weeps Troy's painted woes, For sorrow, like a heavy-hanging bell, Once set on ringing, with his own weight goes; Then little strength rings out the doleful knell. So Lucrece, set a-work, sad tales doth tell	1495

To penciled pensiveness and colored sorrow;  
She lends them words, and she their looks doth borrow.

She throws her eyes about the painting round,  
And who she finds forlorn she doth lament. 1500

At last she sees a wretchèd image bound,  
That piteous looks to Phrygian shepherds lent.  
His face, though full of cares, yet showed content;  
Onward to Troy with the blunt swains he goes,  
So mild that patience seemed to scorn his woes. 1505

In him the painter labored with his skill  
To hide deceit and give the harmless show  
An humble gait, calm looks, eyes wailing still,  
A brow unbent that seemed to welcome woe,  
Cheeks neither red nor pale but mingled so 1510  
That blushing red no guilty instance gave,  
Nor ashy pale the fear that false hearts have.

But, like a constant and confirmèd devil,  
He entertained a show so seeming just,  
And therein so ensconced his secret evil, 1515  
That jealousy itself could not mistrust  
False-creeping craft and perjury should thrust  
Into so bright a day such black-faced storms,  
Or blot with hell-born sin such saintlike forms.

The well-skilled workman this mild image drew 1520  
For perjured Sinon, whose enchanting story  
The credulous old Priam after slew;  
Whose words like wildfire burnt the shining glory  
Of rich-built Ilion, that the skies were sorry,  
And little stars shot from their fixèd places 1525  
When their glass fell wherein they viewed their faces.

This picture she advisedly perused,  
And chid the painter for his wondrous skill,  
Saying some shape in Sinon's was abused;  
So fair a form lodged not a mind so ill. 1530  
And still on him she gazed, and gazing still,  
Such signs of truth in his plain face she spied  
That she concludes the picture was belied.

"It cannot be," quoth she, "that so much guile"—  
She would have said "can lurk in such a look," 1535  
But Tarquin's shape came in her mind the while  
And from her tongue "can lurk" from "cannot" took.  
"It cannot be" she in that sense forsook,  
And turned it thus: "It cannot be, I find,

But such a face should bear a wicked mind. 1540

“For even as subtle Sinon here is painted  
So sober sad, so weary, and so mild,  
As if with grief or travail he had fainted,  
To me came Tarquin armèd too, beguiled  
With outward honesty, but yet defiled 1545  
    With inward vice. As Priam him did cherish,  
    So did I Tarquin; so my Troy did perish.

“Look, look how list’ning Priam wets his eyes  
To see those borrowed tears that Sinon sheeds!  
Priam, why art thou old and yet not wise? 1550  
For every tear he falls, a Trojan bleeds.  
His eye drops fire, no water thence proceeds;  
    Those round clear pearls of his, that move thy pity,  
    Are balls of quenchless fire to burn thy city.

“Such devils steal effects from lightless hell, 1555  
For Sinon in his fire doth quake with cold,  
And in that cold hot-burning fire doth dwell.  
These contraries such unity do hold  
Only to flatter fools and make them bold.  
    So Priam’s trust false Sinon’s tears doth flatter, 1560  
    That he finds means to burn his Troy with water.”

Here, all enraged, such passion her assails  
That patience is quite beaten from her breast.  
She tears the senseless Sinon with her nails,  
Comparing him to that unhappy guest 1565  
Whose deed hath made herself herself detest.  
    At last she smilingly with this gives o’er:  
    “Fool, fool,” quoth she, “his wounds will not be sore.”

Thus ebbs and flows the current of her sorrow,  
And time doth weary time with her complaining. 1570  
She looks for night, and then she longs for morrow,  
And both she thinks too long with her remaining.  
Short time seems long in sorrow’s sharp sustaining;  
    Though woe be heavy, yet it seldom sleeps,  
    And they that watch see time how slow it creeps; 1575

Which all this time hath overslipped her thought  
That she with painted images hath spent,  
Being from the feeling of her own grief brought  
By deep surmise of others’ detriment,  
Losing her woes in shows of discontent. 1580  
    It easeth some, though none it ever cured,  
    To think their dolor others have endured.

But now the mindful messenger, come back,  
Brings home his lord and other company,  
Who finds his Lucrece clad in mourning black, 1585  
And round about her tear-distainèd eye  
Blue circles streamed like rainbows in the sky.  
    These water-galls in her dim element  
    Foretell new storms to those already spent;

Which when her sad-beholding husband saw, 1590  
Amazedly in her sad face he stares.  
Her eyes, though sod in tears, looked red and raw,  
Her lively color killed with deadly cares.  
He hath no power to ask her how she fares;  
    Both stood like old acquaintance in a trance, 1595  
    Met far from home, wond'ring each other's chance.

At last he takes her by the bloodless hand  
And thus begins: "What uncouth ill event  
Hath thee befall'n that thou dost trembling stand?  
Sweet love, what spite hath thy fair color spent? 1600  
Why art thou thus attired in discontent?  
    Unmask, dear dear, this moody heaviness,  
    And tell thy grief, that we may give redress."

Three times with sighs she gives her sorrow fire  
Ere once she can discharge one word of woe. 1605  
At length addressed to answer his desire,  
She modestly prepares to let them know  
Her honor is ta'en prisoner by the foe,  
    While Collatine and his consorted lords  
    With sad attention long to hear her words. 1610

And now this pale swan in her wat'ry nest  
Begins the sad dirge of her certain ending:  
"Few words," quoth she, "shall fit the trespass best  
Where no excuse can give the fault amending.  
In me moe woes than words are now depending, 1615  
    And my laments would be drawn out too long  
    To tell them all with one poor tirèd tongue.

"Then be this all the task it hath to say:  
Dear husband, in the interest of thy bed  
A stranger came, and on that pillow lay 1620  
Where thou wast wont to rest thy weary head;  
And what wrong else may be imaginèd  
    By foul enforcement might be done to me,  
    From that, alas, thy Lucrece is not free.

“For in the dreadful dead of dark midnight, 1625  
With shining falchion in my chamber came  
A creeping creature with a flaming light  
And softly cried, ‘Awake, thou Roman dame,  
And entertain my love, else lasting shame  
On thee and thine this night I will inflict 1630  
If thou my love’s desire do contradict.

“ ‘For some hard-favored groom of thine,’ quoth he,  
‘Unless thou yoke thy liking to my will,  
I’ll murder straight, and then I’ll slaughter thee  
And swear I found you where you did fulfill 1635  
The loathsome act of lust and so did kill  
The lechers in their deed. This act will be  
My fame and thy perpetual infamy.’

“With this, I did begin to start and cry;  
And then against my heart he set his sword, 1640  
Swearing, unless I took all patiently,  
I should not live to speak another word;  
So should my shame still rest upon record,  
And never be forgot in mighty Rome  
Th’ adulterate death of Lucrece and her groom. 1645

“Mine enemy was strong, my poor self weak,  
And far the weaker with so strong a fear.  
My bloody judge forbade my tongue to speak;  
No rightful plea might plead for justice there.  
His scarlet lust came evidence to swear 1650  
That my poor beauty had purloined his eyes,  
And when the judge is robbed, the prisoner dies.

“O, teach me how to make mine own excuse,  
Or, at the least, this refuge let me find:  
Though my gross blood be stained with this abuse, 1655  
Immaculate and spotless is my mind;  
That was not forced, that never was inclined  
To accessory yieldings, but still pure  
Doth in her poisoned closet yet endure.”

Lo, here the hopeless merchant of this loss, 1660  
With head declined and voice dammed up with woe,  
With sad set eyes and ‘wreathèd’ arms across,  
From lips new-waxen pale begins to blow  
The grief away that stops his answer so.  
But, wretched as he is, he strives in vain; 1665  
What he breathes out his breath drinks up again.

As through an arch the violent roaring tide

Outruns the eye that doth behold his haste,  
Yet in the eddy boundeth in his pride  
Back to the strait that forced him on so fast— 1670  
In rage sent out, recalled in rage, being past—  
Even so his sighs, his sorrows, make a saw  
To push grief on, and back the same grief draw,

Which speechless woe of his poor she attendeth,  
And his untimely frenzy thus awaketh: 1675

“Dear lord, thy sorrow to my sorrow lendeth  
Another power; no flood by raining slaketh.  
My woe too sensible thy passion maketh  
More feeling-painful. Let it then suffice  
To drown one woe, one pair of weeping eyes. 1680

“And for my sake when I might charm thee so,  
For she that was thy Lucrece, now attend me:  
Be suddenly revengèd on my foe,  
Thine, mine, his own. Suppose thou dost defend me  
From what is past. The help that thou shalt lend me 1685  
Comes all too late, yet let the traitor die,  
For sparing justice feeds iniquity.

“But ere I name him, you fair lords,” quoth she,  
Speaking to those that came with Collatine,  
“Shall plight your honorable faiths to me 1690  
With swift pursuit to venge this wrong of mine,  
For ’tis a meritorious fair design  
To chase injustice with revengeful arms.  
Knights, by their oaths, should right poor ladies’ harms.”

At this request, with noble disposition 1695  
Each present lord began to promise aid,  
As bound in knighthood to her imposition,  
Longing to hear the hateful foe bewrayed.  
But she, that yet her sad task hath not said,  
The protestation stops: “O, speak,” quoth she, 1700  
“How may this forcèd stain be wiped from me?”

“What is the quality of my offense,  
Being constrained with dreadful circumstance?  
May my pure mind with the foul act dispense,  
My low-declinèd honor to advance? 1705  
May any terms acquit me from this chance?  
The poisoned fountain clears itself again,  
And why not I from this compellèd stain?”

With this they all at once began to say  
Her body’s stain her mind untainted clears, 1710

While with a joyless smile she turns away  
The face, that map which deep impression bears  
Of hard misfortune, carved 「in it」 with tears.  
“No, no,” quoth she, “no dame hereafter living  
By my excuse shall claim excuse’s giving.” 1715

Here with a sigh, as if her heart would break,  
She throws forth Tarquin’s name: “He, he,” she says,  
But more than “he” her poor tongue could not speak,  
Till after many accents and delays,  
Untimely breathings, sick and short assays, 1720  
She utters this: “He, he, fair lords, ’tis he  
That guides this hand to give this wound to me.”

Even here she sheathèd in her harmless breast  
A harmful knife, that thence her soul unsheathed.  
That blow did bail it from the deep unrest 1725  
Of that polluted prison where it breathed.  
Her contrite sighs unto the clouds bequeathed  
Her wingèd sprite, and through her wounds doth fly  
Life’s lasting date from canceled destiny.

Stone-still, astonished with this deadly deed, 1730  
Stood Collatine and all his lordly crew,  
Till Lucrece’ father, that beholds her bleed,  
Himself on her self-slaughtered body threw,  
And from the purple fountain Brutus drew  
The murd’rous knife, and, as it left the place, 1735  
Her blood, in poor revenge, held it in chase;

And, bubbling from her breast, it doth divide  
In two slow rivers, that the crimson blood  
Circles her body in on every side,  
Who, like a late-sacked island, vastly stood 1740  
Bare and unpeopled in this fearful flood.  
Some of her blood still pure and red remained,  
And some looked black, and that false Tarquin stained.

About the mourning and congealèd face  
Of that black blood a wat’ry rigol goes, 1745  
Which seems to weep upon the tainted place;  
And ever since, as pitying Lucrece’ woes,  
Corrupted blood some watery token shows,  
And blood untainted still doth red abide,  
Blushing at that which is so putrefied. 1750

“Daughter, dear daughter,” old Lucretius cries,  
“That life was mine which thou hast here deprived.  
If in the child the father’s image lies,

Where shall I live now Lucrece is unlived?  
Thou wast not to this end from me derived. 1755  
If children predecease progenitors,  
We are their offspring, and they none of ours.

“Poor broken glass, I often did behold  
In thy sweet semblance my old age new born,  
But now that fair fresh mirror dim and old 1760  
Shows me a bare-boned death by time outworn.  
O, from thy cheeks my image thou hast torn,  
And shivered all the beauty of my glass,  
That I no more can see what once I was!

“O Time, cease thou thy course and last no longer 1765  
If they surcease to be that should survive!  
Shall rotten Death make conquest of the stronger  
And leave the falt’ring feeble souls alive?  
The old bees die, the young possess their hive.  
Then, live, sweet Lucrece, live again and see 1770  
Thy father die, and not thy father thee.”

By this starts Collatine as from a dream  
And bids Lucretius give his sorrow place,  
And then in key-cold Lucrece’ bleeding stream  
He falls and bathes the pale fear in his face, 1775  
And counterfeits to die with her a space,  
Till manly shame bids him possess his breath  
And live to be revengèd on her death.

The deep vexation of his inward soul  
Hath served a dumb arrest upon his tongue, 1780  
Who, mad that sorrow should his use control  
Or keep him from heart-easing words so long,  
Begins to talk, but through his lips do throng  
Weak words, so thick come in his poor heart’s aid  
That no man could distinguish what he said. 1785

Yet sometimes “Tarquin” was pronouncèd plain,  
But through his teeth, as if the name he tore.  
This windy tempest, till it blow up rain,  
Held back his sorrow’s tide, to make it more.  
At last it rains, and busy winds give o’er. 1790  
Then son and father weep with equal strife  
Who should weep most, for daughter or for wife.

The one doth call her his, the other his,  
Yet neither may possess the claim they lay.  
The father says, “She’s mine.” “O, mine she is,” 1795  
Replies her husband. “Do not take away



My sorrow's interest. Let no mourner say  
He weeps for her, for she was only mine  
And only must be wailed by Collatine."

"O," quoth Lucretius, "I did give that life  
Which she too early and too late hath spilled." 1800

"Woe, woe," quoth Collatine, "she was my wife.  
I owed her, and 'tis mine that she hath killed."  
"My daughter" and "my wife" with clamors filled  
The dispersed air, who, holding Lucrece' life, 1805  
Answered their cries, "my daughter" and "my wife."

Brutus, who plucked the knife from Lucrece' side,  
Seeing such emulation in their woe,  
Began to clothe his wit in state and pride,  
Burying in Lucrece' wound his folly's show. 1810  
He with the Romans was esteemèd so  
As silly jeering idiots are with kings,  
For sportive words and utt'ring foolish things.

But now he throws that shallow habit by  
Wherein deep policy did him disguise, 1815  
And armed his long-hid wits advisedly  
To check the tears in Collatinus' eyes:

"Thou wrongèd lord of Rome," quoth he, "arise!  
Let my unsounded self, supposed a fool,  
Now set thy long-experienced wit to school." 1820

"Why, Collatine, is woe the cure for woe?  
Do wounds help wounds, or grief help grievous deeds?  
Is it revenge to give thyself a blow  
For his foul act by whom thy fair wife bleeds?  
Such childish humor from weak minds proceeds. 1825  
Thy wretchèd wife mistook the matter so  
To slay herself, that should have slain her foe.

"Courageous Roman, do not steep thy heart  
In such relenting dew of lamentations,  
But kneel with me and help to bear thy part 1830  
To rouse our Roman gods with invocations,  
That they will suffer these abominations—  
Since Rome herself in them doth stand disgraced—  
By our strong arms from forth her fair streets chased.

"Now, by the Capitol, that we adore, 1835  
And by this chaste blood so unjustly stained,  
By heaven's fair sun that breeds the fat earth's store,  
By all our country rights in Rome maintained,  
And by chaste Lucrece' soul that late complained

Her wrongs to us, and by this bloody knife, 1840  
We will revenge the death of this true wife.”

This said, he struck his hand upon his breast,  
And kissed the fatal knife to end his vow,  
And to his protestation urged the rest,  
Who, wond’ring at him, did his words allow. 1845  
Then jointly to the ground their knees they bow,  
And that deep vow which Brutus made before  
He doth again repeat, and that they swore.

When they had sworn to this advisèd doom,  
They did conclude to bear dead Lucrece thence 1850  
To show her bleeding body thorough Rome,  
And so to publish Tarquin’s foul offense;  
Which being done with speedy diligence,  
The Romans plausibly did give consent  
To Tarquin’s everlasting banishment. 1855

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