

The Voices of Life and Death in Shakespeare's Narrative Poems

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Jonathan Locke Hart,

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Thematic Issue ***Voices of Life, Illness and Disabilities in Life Writing and Medical Narratives.***

Ed. I-Chun Wang, Jonathan Locke Hart, Cindy Chopoidaló, and David Porter

<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol20/iss5/5>>

Abstract: In his article "The Voices of Life and Death in Shakespeare's Narrative Poems," Jonathan Locke Hart uses Shakespeare's dedications and *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* to discuss art and life, death and life, life-writing and death-writing. The relation between life and art, often framed in terms of mimesis, is fraught with difficulties, so that the connection between ethics and aesthetics is intricate. After briefly discussing the theoretical debate on mimesis, this article examines closely Shakespeare's narrative poems, to discuss life and death as well as, to some extent, health, illness. The poems explore the themes of time, love, lust and death in speaking about life, in having a speaker create a narrative of life and death. Poems are about voice and how those voices represent the life of the speaker (narrator, characters) in relation to the reader. Then and now, matters of life and death, have many facets, so this element of life-writing, including death-writing, and this article will try to suggest some aspects of the variety of its representations, voices and responses to it.

Jonathan Locke HART

The Voices of Life and Death in Shakespeare's Narrative Poems

In poetry the voices of life, death and emotional and ethical health recur as central concerns, evidence that the themes of literature are also part of the mimesis and refraction of literature in recreating the world through art. In the tenth book of *Republic*, Plato sees poetry as representation or imitation at three removes from reality. But, as we shall see, the matter is more intricate, and this article will lay out a brief theoretical basis to argue for the close but complex relations between word and world, ethics and aesthetics, no matter how refractory and complicated those connections are. Then the essay will proceed to a discussion of non-dramatic poetry as life-writing, using Shakespeare especially to illustrate that although poetry is refractory, it relates to the world and its concerns in complex ways that are ethical and aesthetic. Mimesis, the relation between word and world (image and the world or even word image and the world), is a matter in which the moral and the beautiful are inextricably connected.

Part of the complexity in this debate on mimesis and the nature of the good, the just, the true and the beautiful and their connection is that in ancient Athens there was a rift between philosophers and poets, with the Socratic attack on Homer and the Aristophanic attack on Socrates. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle see the good, the true, the just and the beautiful as being closely related. In some contexts in the Platonic dialogues, Socrates (and, by implication, Plato) charges Homer and the poets with the seduction others with their poetic art away from what is good or ethical. Poets, in this part of the Socratic view, represent scenes and characters that refract or challenge with their art the moral realm of their societies, but the ethical and aesthetic seem stubbornly meshed.

Plato employed *mimesis* to describe a poetic process. The comedies of Aristophanes represent Euripides and tragedy in terms of *mimēsthai* and *mimesis* pejoratively (*Birds* 787, 1444; *Clouds* 1091; *Plutus* 423–24 cited in Pappas). A dramatic poet or playwright, Aristophanes includes a moral critique of poetry while lampooning Socrates in *Clouds*. Plato, the poetic philosopher, critiques poetry and Aristophanes, the critical poet, criticizes poetry and critique (philosophy) (see Aristophanes, *Clouds*; Plato, *Republic*; Pappas). Aesthetics and ethics are hard to separate because they seem inseparable from the start (see Auerbach; De Caro; Hart, "Aesthetics" 236–250; Nussbaum 433–497; Pappas; Woodruff 329–340). In *Frogs* -- which at the Lenaia of 405, won the first prize and Plato's *Cleophon* was third -- Aristophanes assesses tragedy (Aristophanes, *Frogs*; Henderson 3–4; Hart, *Textual* 218; see Hart, *Textual* 20–27 for the discussion in the following sentences in this paragraph). In *Apology* 22a–b and *Ion* 542a, Plato argues that poets are inspired but not wise and has the Platonic Socrates calling into question their authority. Poets and imitation are important in *Republic*, where in Book 2, Plato emphasizes the ethics of representation. In Book 3 at 388a—Plato calls attention to the questionable moral aspect of how Homer and other poets portray Achilles' mourning for Patroclus while in Book 8 at 568b he says that tragic poets are not to be admitted to the republic because they praise tyranny. Subsequently in Book 8, he develops this accusation that poets represent at three removes from reality (597e–598a, 598e–600e, 601a–b). What a poet knows is a key to Plato's discussion of the nature of imitation in Book 10 of *Republic*, and the argument is that the beautiful in poetry is not always good and true (602b–c, 603a, 605 b–d, 606a–607b, 607e–608d) and Plato returns to the exile of the poets from the city and notes the old quarrel between poetry and philosophy, which also occurs in *Laws* (967 c–d). Thus, Plato's view of poetry in terms of beauty and truth (including justice) is complex. Moreover, the Athenian, in Book 7 of the *Laws*, describes tragic poets whose state is an imitation of the best life (817b). In *Timaeus* the transient world imitates the eternal. All human mimesis, including poetry and philosophy, cannot measure up to divine mimesis. In *Critias*, contrary to the *Sophist* and Book 10 of *Republic*, mimesis is positive because to everything spoken is image-making and imitation (107b–d). So Plato is intricate on this question.

In *Poetics*, Aristotle varies his use of mimesis, including copying and creating, observing that the poet makes the probable or necessary and expresses the universal in many genres, most notably tragedy and epic. Aristotle analyzes tragedy and epic in detail while, with Plato, considering philosophy as the most universal way to truth (see Aristotle, *The Poetics*; Aristotle, *Poetics*; Halliwell 109–122; Hart, *Textual* 27–32). So in discussing art and life, poetry and the world, the relation is not settled and is unsettling. There is a moral dimension to poetry that even Plato admits in places and the notions of anagnorisis (recognition) and catharsis (the purging of pity and terror) in Aristotle allow for the performance of the ethical in the art of drama, so that Homer and the tragic poeticians have moral dimensions.

This is also true of poets from the Renaissance onward, as Erich Auerbach recognized long ago, which is the focus of this article. Mimesis is creative as well as reflective. Shakespeare represent life in ways that speak to our notions of health, illness and death. These are moral and aesthetic works and not moralistic delusions or seductions that take people (readers) away from the tough questions of existence.

Shakespeare's dedications to the narrative poems and the poetry itself are a kind of life-writing for author and each character. Lyrics are about voice and how those voices represent the life of the speaker in relation to the reader. Then and now, matters of life and death, have many facets and affect mind, body and soul (thoughts and feelings), so this element of life-writing, including death-writing, is multifaceted. This article will try to suggest some aspects of the variety of representations, voices and responses.

Lyric poetry, like drama, stages life and death and this theatre of living and dying is in our lives but also creates a possible or fictional world for us to consider that is analogous and parallel. Art is of life and refracts life but is not life. Jacques and Lear die but are reborn with each performance whereas playwright, actor and audience die and so is the poem reread and performed in the mind of the reader. The theatre and the lyric are performed and completed (provisionally, tentatively) in the minds and bodies of the audience (reader, theatregoer). The lives of others become part of the lives of the audience, so life-writing is a matter for author and audience as they complete and perform life in a dual moment. Life cannot be separated from death. One defines the other. In these two poems from the Renaissance, representations of life are also in counterpoint to death. Life-writing is also death-writing. This is a key point for this article.

Shakespeare, quite notoriously, writes the lives of others but never his own. His dedications to *Venus and Adonis* (all Shakespeare texts referenced appear in *The Complete Works*) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (published in 1594 as *Lucrece*) are as close as we come to his life. We have a few signatures and a deposition in a trial mediated by a court reporter, and a will, which is another legal document full of conventions. So the most famous of authors wrote no autobiography or had no biography that was written about him while he was alive.

The dedications of the narrative poems show how difficult it is to separate the author who uses allusion and literary convention from the man who is speaking to his potential patron. This dedication to *Venus and Adonis* (1593) takes lines from Ovid (P. Ovidius Naso), *Amores*, I, xv, 35-36, which can be translated as follows: "Let vulgar writings be wondered at by the common sort; for me, may golden-haired Apollo minister full cups of Castalian water." Translated as "Let base-conceited wits admire vile things, /Fair Phoebus, lead me to the Muses' springs" by Christopher Marlowe, *Ovid's Elegies*, I, xv, 35-36" (Bardelmann). Moreover, the water of the Castalian spring at the foot of Mount Parnassus led to poetic inspiration (see Bardelmann). This dedication is to someone Shakespeare seems to have known, "TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE HENRY WRIOTHESLY, EARL OF SOUTHAMPTON, AND BARON OF TICHFIELD. RIGHT HONORABLE" (see, Shakespeare; all citations and quotations from this edition). The language is courtly and ingenious as much to conceal as to reveal the author in life and art: "I KNOW not how I shall offend in dedicating my unpolished lines to your lordship, nor how the world will censure me for choosing so strong a prop to support so weak a burden only, if your honour seem but pleased, I account myself highly praised, and vow to take advantage of all idle hours, till I have honoured you with some graver labour." The topos is that of modesty and of the unworthiness of the lines offered and in search, despite of this, for the praise of his honour, the dedicatee. Shakespeare returns to the theme of the work not being well-formed: "But if the first heir of my invention prove deformed, I shall be sorry it had so noble a god-father, and never after ear so barren a land, for fear it yield me still so bad a harvest." Here, the "noble" Southampton might be (Shakespeare uses if as a condition, so this is not a statement) the godfather to this heir of invention, which the poet fears might be "deformed" and will be a bad harvest despite the patron's nobility.

In this dedication, Shakespeare plays on "honour" and its cognates: "I leave it to your honourable survey, and your honour to your heart's content; which I wish may always answer your own wish and the world's hopeful expectation." Thus, Shakespeare leaves the poem, which is "unpolished" and part of his "idle hours" and should seek "some graver labour," and seems to hope that his "honour," this "lordship," will be pleased and survey it to his "heart's content." The poet also plays on words at the end of the dedication, the survey and content of the honourable lord whom the author says: "I wish may always answer your own wish and the world's hopeful expectation." Through "wish," Shakespeare bonds with Southampton, hoping that his poem will answer the lord, who seems to be pleased by it, and that wish and the expected hope of the world for this poem, which is a good deal, considering how the poet himself has brought it low in his own modesty. This is signed in a courtly manner and all

according to convention: "Your honour's in all duty, WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE." The life of the poet is and is not the life of the poem, and how it is made and received become part of a convention of the begging author to the magnanimous and honorable patron or dedicatee, so that we can see that Shakespeare makes appeals to childbirth and harvest as to the world, but also creates intricate plays on words like "honour" and "wish" to make and erase his tracks as a person and an artist.

The controversy over mimesis is embedded in this dedication because the poet represents the poem as unworthy of the world but hopes that the dedicatee and the world will approve of it. What their wishes and hopes are makes the poem worthy, so they complete the poem and their attitudes and desires allow it space or not. This is a partial fiction because it is true that Southampton and other readers will complete the performance of the poem to give it meaning, but of course the poet has to write it. The stronger the poem, the more likely it is to endure in the world. In fact, the poem has outlasted Shakespeare and Southampton, has its own life as a work of art beyond this mortal life of individual humans, like the poet and the dedicatee (first and foremost reader).

The dedication to *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) is also to the same patron and perhaps this is the graver labour that Shakespeare alludes to in the earlier dedication that we have just examined. This dedicatory preamble, "TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE HENRY WRIOTHESLY, Earl of Southampton, and Baron of Tichfield," is also intricate but is briefer than the first (Shakespeare, here and below). The theme here is love: "The love I dedicate to your lordship is without end; whereof this pamphlet, without beginning, is but a superfluous moiety." Shakespeare uses wit again to play on how unworthy he is and how worthy the dedicatee is. His endless love he dedicates to this lord but the "pamphlet," which has not begun, is but a "superfluous" half, something not fully worthy.

Once more, as in the dedication to *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare appeals to the character of Southampton as something generous that will make room or allowance or will permit the poem: "The warrant I have of your honourable disposition, not the worth of my untutored lines, makes it assured of acceptance." Here, there is more assurance of the poem being accepted by Southampton, perhaps because he had already shown acceptance of *Venus and Adonis*. In keeping with the earlier dedication, Shakespeare contrasts the worthlessness of his poetry with the worthiness of this lordly dedicatee. Southampton's disposition is great and "not the worth of my untutored lines." Still, Shakespeare makes the gift of his making or poetry: "What I have done is yours; what I have to do is yours; being part in all I have, devoted yours." What Shakespeare has done and will do is "yours" and here he uses terminal repetition in the clauses or epistrophe to stress that he is giving this repeated play on "done" and "do" (cognates) to you, the dedicatee. The analytical structure of subject to object through the verb translates the doing of the poet and person to the dedicatee or patron, and what is done and to do Shakespeare interrupts and qualifies with a clause "being part in all I have," to complete this gift. The giving is part of all Shakespeare has and is given as "yours" (the third time the word appears at the end of the clauses and here ends the sentence). Shakespeare returns to "worth": "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." Shakespeare likes in these dedications to use polyptoton or the repetition of words of the same root, here "long" and "lengthened." The poet, who favours conditions in these dedications, says that if his "worth" were greater, his "duty" would be greater, but that duty is still bound to this lord, to whom he wishes a long life, and Shakespeare elongates the life by stretching out its root with "lengthened" and does so "with all happiness."

Even in signing off, Shakespeare plays on duty - "Your lordship's in all duty, WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE." He is Southampton's now unreservedly "in all duty," which is extended from the qualifications and limitations in the previous play on "worth" and "duty" as something relative and conditional. The "long life" of Southampton, which Shakespeare wishes to be "still lengthened with all happiness," is part of a play on words and the poet relates "all happiness" with "all duty" too, bringing together, after so many qualifications, an absolute and unqualified happiness for the dedicatee as wished for and as given in "all duty," by William Shakespeare.

These dedications are full of conventions and are not revealing, but they are in Shakespeare's authorial voice and perhaps even his personal one. So we have life-writing that is fictional and a part of literary convention that is not revealingly autobiographical if such a thing exists. Shakespeare writes fictional lives in the poems. He represents the tension between Venus and Adonis in life and death as well as that between Tarquin and Lucrece (Hyland 67-122; Cheney 81-142).

The argument Venus makes for making love and having children through breeding is similar to the one that the speaker or poet shapes in the first sonnets on generation in Shakespeare's sequence. For instance, she pleads with Adonis (*Venus and Adonis* 189-94). Nature allows life to survive individual death through breeding, and this view allows for an idea of life and death beyond the individual life to

a continuous cycle generation to generation that endures. This provides a point of view that considers family and the collective and not simply the person. It may be part of the *carpe diem* of seduction and physical love but paradoxically appeals to something more enduring than individual love or lust.

Venus is "the love-sick queen" who begins to sweat, and Adonis, unlike Titan, neglects her. Adonis sees love in terms of life and death: "My love to love is love but to disgrace it;/For I have heard it is a life in death, /That laughs and weeps, and all but with a breath." Venus represents life and death in terms of desire and joy: "Do I delight to die, or life desire?/But now I lived, and life was death's annoy;/But now I died, and death was lively joy." Elizabeth puns on "die" are like the French *la petite mort*, as used in the sixteenth century, the little death of orgasm as opposed to the big death that ends this mortal life. She says in this vein: "O, thou didst kill me: kill me once again." Physical love becomes in this language something that heals (526-31). Love drives out infection and breath banishes the plague and so life and death hang in the balance. A kiss is a cure, a kind of greening of health. But there can also be negative emotions (676-81). Venus experiences divination in regard to the life and death of Adonis, who will bleed and will be hunted by the boar that he would hunt. The violence in nature, in the hunt and in Adonis' preference for pursuing the boar rather than the goddess of love, trying to kill the boar as opposed to "dying" in bed with Venus, leads the poet to use the imagery of life and death as well as that of sickness (761-66).

Love is a kind of death, but nature dies in making Adonis so fair. Poetry, like the prose of the dedications, is coiled in syntax and grammar, allusion and image, and here Shakespeare employs medical language to make this point about the young lover who turns his back on the pursuit of love and even the goddess of love for the fatal violence of the hunt in which the hunter is hunted and dies trying to kill his prey. Venus does what poor people do, infusing signs "with dreadful prophecies": "So she at these sad signs draws up her breath/And sighing it again, exclaims on Death." She chides Death as a tyrant and a ghost, blind and random. Shakespeare makes the language explicit in the confusion and distinction of the "weapons" or missiles of death and love: "Love's golden arrow at him should have fled,/And not Death's ebon dart, to strike dead." Love should create life and not lead to death. Venus' address to Death is at length and has its twists and turns: "Now Nature cares not for thy mortal vigour,/ Since her best work is ruin'd with thy rigour." The vigour and rigour of Death ruins Nature's best work, like the youth and beauty of Adonis, so that is part of the precariousness of health and life. She then says Death is not to blame (her personification shifts) and calls "him king of graves and grave for kings,/ Imperious supreme of all mortal things." Life and health cannot escape the reign of Death or the grave he makes for each mortal. Venus addresses Death (1019-24). Besides blaming fear, for she fears that the boar will kill Adonis as she has had a premonition, Venus tells Death she was joking and even reiterates that she is afraid of her "love's decease." She blames the boar for provoking her tongue and says he -this prey - had done Death wrong and slandered him. Venus also impugns grief and makes a comment, even though she is a goddess, about "ten women's wit" could not rule double-tongued grief. The narrator amplifies Venus' words of hope in life and death, how she flatters Death so that Adonis might live (1031-36). Venus wavers and her emotions are in flux as she grapples with thoughts of the life and death of Adonis and of his beauty and her love for him. The life of this goddess is all too human as feelings and thoughts govern her body, mind and tongue. She invokes Zeus now that she is done talking with Death. Love and physical attraction, imagination and argument, persuasion and retraction, vacillation and the relation between word and deed all govern her health and state (1037-42). Venus plays on life and death and her logic leads her from death to beauty to the death of beauty and thus to chaos. She says: "black chaos comes again" - an earlier version of what Shakespeare gives to another lover who goes from one verbal extreme to another: Othello, who at Act III, scene 3, exclaims of Desdemona: "Excellent wretch .../Chaos is come again." Chaos does come for both Venus and Othello, although she lacks the physical violence that his emotional turmoil produces. The boar kills Adonis: Othello kills Desdemona.

Love, then, becomes a matter of turmoil and upsets balance even in a goddess. Shakespeare represents love, which includes physical attraction, as something chaotic in the order of private and public lives (1181-86). Love causes war, dissension between father and son and other "dire events," while Death destroys Venus' love, Adonis, in his prime, from which she generalizes that those who love best shall not enjoy their love. In love and life, then, there is no fairness, only a destroying Death that she personifies and we all face and by whom we are all destroyed. That puts life, health and happiness into a reality not made for happiness but according to the facts of nature, which she interprets. Shakespeare's poetry interprets the relation between life and death, world and word (word images included), and that mimesis raises issues about the nature of love and existence itself. Shakespeare balances his words and their mimesis through characters like Adonis and Venus, who speak from their

own point of view, and the narrator who speaks from his, all of whom Shakespeare gives language to but does not side with.

Through the narrator, Shakespeare achieves a transformation worthy of Ovid in *Metamorphoses*. Adonis lies dead and any notion of wellness in the face of this loss seems at first impossible (1187-92). Poetry can repair the ruins of life and be more supernatural than natural at times and so life and death, health and illness sometimes become part of another framework beyond this mortal life. Adonis, who lies beside her, turns to vapor and his blood metamorphoses to a purple and white flower which resembles or mimes his pale cheeks on which stood drops of blood. This is a realistic mimesis in an anti-realist or unreal transformation, that goes beyond nature in a strict sense. Nature regenerates but not so quickly and not in a flower imitating a human. In art, this works well because art has a whole spectrum, which includes realism but many other elements, in its representation of reality. Art supplements, reverses, imitates and much else.

The narrator reinforces this mimetic relation between the flower and Adonis, and does so in part through his description of Venus' response (1193-98). Here, the narrator had Venus bow to smell the flower and to compare its smell with Adonis' breath, which shall be within her bosom now that death rent him from her, and after cropping the stalk, she sees the green sap where it is cut and its drops she likens to tears. Shakespeare uses the polyptoton of "Comparing" and "compares" to show how actively Venus makes comparisons between the dead lover and the flower, between human and non-human in nature. For Shakespeare, this is a mimesis in art of her thoughts and feelings in a natural world with a transformation not possible in nature at such a pace.

Mythology imbues *Venus and Adonis*, which Shakespeare created with a debt to *Metamorphoses* X of perhaps his favourite poet, Ovid. Euripides' *Hippolytus*, represents the story differently and has Artemis, goddess of the hunt, revenge herself for her favourite, Hippolytus, because Adonis had encroached on her domain, the hunt. Shakespeare's poem ends with the words of goddess and the narrator. Venus (Aphrodite) mourns Adonis and her speech to that effect: "There shall not be one minute in an hour/ Wherein I will not kiss my sweet love's flower." The narrator gives the conclusion to the action (1211-16). This story about gods and mortals ends with the goddess of love flying through empty skies (as if vacant from the void left by the death of Adonis) and in Paphos she walls herself up, immured, away from the world of which she is weary. Life and death in this poem are a matter of natural and supernatural, mortal and divine, and the thoughts are all too human for poet and the narrator and characters he makes. A goddess falls in love with a mortal and considers mortality from her immortality but in the mortal language of Shakespeare who seeks literary immortality (Dubrow 21-76; Hart, "Till" 37-47; Kuchar 1-24; Starks-Estes 63-82; Maurette 355-379).

In *Lucrece*, with its epic features like those in *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare continues to explore love, lust, life and death as well as various mental and emotional states. Once more, as in the earlier narrative poem, *The Rape of Lucrece* goes to a story from the classical past, this time from Rome, to its history and mythology. King Tarquin finds that he is attracted to Lucrece, the wife of Collatine, one of the Roman nobles, and weighs the ethical wrong of that temptation with his sexual desire for her. Shakespeare represents through an aesthetics of seduction an ethics of private and public worlds. Besides employing the characters, Shakespeare uses the narrator to represent in terms of images of life and death the dilemma of the temptations of beauty and ethical action (178-84). Shakespeare employs amplification to show various aspects to the internal conflict within Tarquin and other humans, how honour and dishonour vie in life and to death (192-98). Here, Shakespeare has the narrator repeat "honour" three times. There is a battle in life between wealth and honour and its loss is death. The poet narrates to create atmosphere in "the dead of night,/When heavy sleep had closed up mortal eyes." He represents images of the "death-boding cries" of owls and wolves surprising in the hunt "silly lambs," and Shakespeare adds: "pure thoughts are dead and still,/ While lust and murder wake to stain and kill." So this imagery of predation in nature is parallel to that of Tarquin planning to seduce or force Lucrece: this imitation of nature is like that in kind of the flower and Adonis that we discussed earlier.

Shakespeare employs his narrator to represent the dilemma for Tarquin over and over with variations on the theme, so that while revealing the tactile nature of lust, nature and the human world, the poet is not showing some facile seduction or paean to beauty or the erotic without consequence (220-26). This desire is like a brain-sickness, so lust is an illness and not something to be celebrated, having "foul charm." The verse itself shows the back and forth Tarquin experiences, the flattery and fear in his experience of lust. Like Venus who addresses death, Tarquin speaks to the fire on his flint that is like the fire of his lust: "And to the flame thus speaks advisedly,/ 'As from this cold flint I enforced this fire,/ So Lucrece must I force to my desire.'" Shakespeare uses natural images as analogies for human desire and weakness.

As in *Venus and Adonis*, here the poet connects life and death in love and lust, and he picks up in earlier lines of *Lucrece* and here on the word "strife" (451-57). In this scene, the poet has the narrator imagine –"As if" -- life and death were not in strife but one lived in the other in a kind of chiasmus. This matter of beauty, truth and justice is a matter of life and death and not some aesthetic seduction that Socrates and Plato sometimes saw in Homer and other poets.

The image of war and the analogy of lust being like a battle develop the narrator's description of Tarquin's internal struggle or dilemma (479-85). Shakespeare builds up the images of pillage, exploits, death, ravishment, tears, groans, and makes children and mothers the victims. Each line ends with a participle, all ending in "ing" as well as "straggling" in the first line of the stanza and "beating" in the penultimate verse. The "bloody death" of war and the "beating heart," presumably of Tarquin, lead to the image in war and lust of "hot charge." The energy of these participles gives, through these verbs, action to the words in a movement like lust itself.

The continued use of participles as adjectives and verbs provides the verse and the description motion and this dynamic imitates the effect *Lucrece* has on Tarquin's body and the moral dilemma it causes him (486-92). This seduction or rape is something the narrator describes so that the male readers (and probably many of the readers would be male) would be put into the uneasy place where Tarquin is, forcing an unwilling woman sexually. This rhetoric of seduction happens through the aesthetic qualities of the poetry and leaves an ethical dimension, which Socrates and Plato noted. Poets can seduce just as Tarquin can and readers, like *Lucrece*, can be seduced, but also the male reader can become complicit in the erotics of reading this erotic poetry (see Dubrow; Hart, "Narratorial" 59-77; Belsey 90-107).

The narrator Shakespeare has given the language of lust and seduction, but here *Lucrece* gives Tarquin a lesson in ethics, makes general statements on human morality (682-87). Men do not often see their own faults, but think the same would be "death-worthy" in their brother, so their own "infamies" and "misdeeds" they look at "askance." This is the vile "spectacle" and viewing one's "trespass in another." So they smother their own "transgressions," a kind of moral blindness and even sickness that is hypocritical. Here, the spiritual ailment affects men when least they admit to it. At about lines 745 to 751, Shakespeare has his narrator, as he had in *Venus and Adonis*, use images of the hunt. This time "the full-fed hound or gorged hawk" feeds on its prey and likens each to "surfeit-taking Tarquin," who has delicious taste that sours in digestion and "Devours his will, that lived by foul devouring."

By line 780, Shakespeare gives his narrator two stanzas that show the consequences of what Tarquin thought would be his moment of delight, so much so that he forced or raped *Lucrece* (780-86). Tarquin, as the narrator's moral would have it, is oxymoronic –he is a "captive victor" losing in his gain. His wound will never heal, the scar remaining and so too his spoil and pain to perplex and remind him. *Lucrece* bears literally the load of his lust and he "a guilty mind" as a burden. The poet continues this double portrait, this comparison of contrasts between Tarquin and *Lucrece* after the rape (787-93). As in *Venus and Adonis*, in *Lucrece*, Shakespeare uses natural imagery as a way of comparison or of making sense of the human world. *Lucrece* speaks to the Night as *Venus* had to *Death*, blaming it for misfortune (815-21). Night becomes hell, shame, sin, chaos, blame, bawdiness, defamation, death, treason, conspiracy treason and ravishment. This apostrophe of something absent made present is a way to express her grief after this trauma to her body, soul, mind. She is not silent here in reaction to this rape, this death in life *Lucrece* also moves to apostrophize or address *Time*, which she also associates with *Night*, which is also personified (976-82). She addresses *Rome*, which she calls mishapened and sees as a mate or friend of *Night*, which is ugly and she enumerates all its faults, including being a pack-horse of sin and the snare of virtue, nursing and murdering all, injurious and shifting. Finally, she accuses *Time* of being guilty of her death because of her crime (that is presumably allowing Tarquin to rape her). *Time* makes and kills life and that is the dilemma of youth and age, in sickness and health. That is, as *Lucrece* says, human life. She will kill herself but not till she has told *Collatine* the cause, so he can avenge her death on Tarquin. This trauma silences *Lucrece* in death in a kind of Roman honour but not before she has spoken at length to Tarquin and others and to the reader. The poem is the representation of her wounding and wound. Despite speaking at some length, *Lucrece* talks, at line 1249, about "This brief abridgement of my will I make." Her father, *Lucretius*, pleads that she will live (1802). The child lies in "the fathers image" and he uses a mimetic mirror as an image to express that a child dying before her father is a kind of death to him (1809-15). The mirror lies broken as it does in the deposition scene of Shakespeare's *Richard II*, and *Lucrece*, a mirror of life and the world, becomes a reflection of death for her father and her body, born partly of him, dies. The trauma to her body has now worn out time and leaves her to death. *Collatine* bids *Lucretius* to leave his sorrow aside for revenge (1823f.). *Brutus* takes up the knife from *Lucrece's* side and the vengeance is ensured (1858). The

narrator ends the poem with Tarquin's banishment (1900-06). This life and death of Lucrece is the suffering of a private person and body that has public implications and is one of the founding myths of Rome. Her premature death by honourable suicide and the taking up of her cause to avenge that death mean that Rome banished its lusting king – a rapist – and founded a republic and whose descendent, Brutus, in *Julius Caesar*, tries to preserve from the encroachments of a new monarchy in the empire.

In these two dedications and narrative poems, Shakespeare represents the effects of wounds or trauma on Venus and on Lucrece and those she leaves behind with her suicide. Shakespeare shows the pain and suffering of these two female characters and the effects of the trauma on their bodies, minds and emotions through a representation of their thoughts and feelings but also through the narrator and the response of others. The deaths of Adonis and of Lucrece, both in their youth and at the height of their physical beauty, allow for meditations on time, death, lust, and life. Life-writing here is also death-writing.

Shakespeare, in the voice of the poet, plays with how worthy the poems are for such a great dedicatee, Southampton, but then creates, as he did in the sonnets, poems that will not die or at least will outlast the mortal lives of Shakespeare and Southampton, not to mention the lives of the original Elizabethan readers. Shakespeare represents life and death, art and life in these dedications and in the poems and the very intricacy of his art sometimes enhances our understanding of life but also makes the relation between aesthetics and ethics complex. One thing is sure is that the poems, even with all their passages of erotic and seductive imagery, raise moral questions and search out some of the complexities of life and death and how wellness can soon become emotional or physical illness and death. The poets have as much to represent about life and its dilemmas as the philosophers, some of whom accuse them of abusing mimesis and seducing youth and others to immorality and to what is not for the private and public good.

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