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Action Figures in Shakespeare's *Lucrece*

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Article abstract

Lorsqu'à la suite d'une longue série d'apostrophes à la Nuit, la Chance, et le Temps, Lucrece dénonce sa propre façon de se plaindre et condamne ses vaines paroles, elle utilise de nouveau l'apostrophe, transformant ainsi ses mots en action d'une façon particulière, désignée par la « figure d'action » (« action figure », d'après les historiens de la rhétorique tels que George Puttenham). La manière avec laquelle le langage figuratif de Shakespeare dans ce poème fait appel à plusieurs reprises à un sens de l'action — activité, *energeia* — amène à reconsidérer l'importance du drame dans cette oeuvre essentiellement narrative, et la nature de la pensée. La charge dramatique de ces figures, ainsi que leur interaction avec l'intrigue, ouvrent de nouvelles perspectives au sujet du rôle de Lucrece en tant que protagoniste. L'importance mise sur l'activité dans le langage même de l'oeuvre met en lumière le rôle d'agent du personnage, tout particulièrement dans les figures de style qui ont souvent été considérées comme l'expression de sa passivité et de son immobilisme, telles qu'apostrophe, proclamation, *syneciosis* ou paradoxe, et *ecphrasis*. Ce drame de l'action, même au coeur de la souffrance et de grande tristesse, est par ailleurs éclairé à l'aide d'un passage de la Poétique, dans laquelle Aristote avance qu'un *pathos* est une *praxis*. Le parcours d'une victime de viol souffrante et réussissant quand même à exercer assez de force pour infléchir les événements et la signification de cette tragédie est un processus d'une importance capitale pour la compréhension de Lucrece; ce qui comporte aussi des implications significatives pour la dynamique entre le langage et l'intrigue, voir pour la pensée, ainsi que pour l'oeuvre subséquente de Shakespeare.

Action Figures in Shakespeare's *Lucrece*

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Lorsqu'à la suite d'une longue série d'apostrophes à la Nuit, la Chance, et le Temps, Lucrece dénonce sa propre façon de se plaindre et condamne ses vaines paroles, elle utilise de nouveau l'apostrophe, transformant ainsi ses mots en action d'une façon particulière, désignée par la « figure d'action » (« action figure », d'après les historiens de la rhétorique tels que George Puttenham). La manière avec laquelle le langage figuratif de Shakespeare dans ce poème fait appel à plusieurs reprises à un sens de l'action — activité, *energeia* — amène à reconsidérer l'importance du drame dans cette œuvre essentiellement narrative, et la nature de la pensée. La charge dramatique de ces figures, ainsi que leur interaction avec l'intrigue, ouvrent de nouvelles perspectives au sujet du rôle de Lucrece en tant que protagoniste. L'importance mise sur l'activité dans le langage même de l'œuvre met en lumière le rôle d'agent du personnage, tout particulièrement dans les figures de style qui ont souvent été considérées comme l'expression de sa passivité et de son immobilisme, telles qu'apostrophe, proclamation, *syneciosis* ou paradoxe, et *ecphrasis*. Ce drame de l'action, même au cœur de la souffrance et de grande tristesse, est par ailleurs éclairé à l'aide d'un passage de la Poétique, dans laquelle Aristote avance qu'un *pathos* est une *praxis*. Le parcours d'une victime de viol souffrante et réussissant quand même à exercer assez de force pour infléchir les événements et la signification de cette tragédie est un processus d'une importance capitale pour la compréhension de Lucrece; ce qui comporte aussi des implications significatives pour la dynamique entre le langage et l'intrigue, voir pour la pensée, ainsi que pour l'œuvre subséquente de Shakespeare.

Published in 1594, *The Rape of Lucrece*, like its earlier companion poem *Venus and Adonis*, was written during a period when the London theatres were closed because of the plague. Shakespeare is compelled to take a holiday from the theatre, and like any other workaholic, he contrives to work his way through the holiday. He seems to have been particularly proud of the results, prefacing both narrative poems with elaborate dedications to the Earl of Southampton and refining his literary ambitions with respect to both audience and genre.¹ He may also appear to take a sort of holiday from the pressure of making his work dramatic, particularly with respect to *Lucrece*, which so alters and slows down the rapid, headlong rush of the story he

inherited from Livy and Ovid as to make the reader wonder, at times, if anything will ever happen. The poem retains the bombastic rhetoric of the early stage plays and yet tremendously reduces the crowded scenes and incidents that are so typical of them. And the rhetoric of the poem, insofar as it generates lengthy disputations and copious complaints, has not always endeared itself to readers, though there have recently been some impressive defenses of that rhetoric, mostly on the grounds of psychological acuity and thematic complexity. My concern, however, is to reconsider the relation of drama and rhetoric in the poem.² What if the figures of bombast in *Lucrece*, or at least some of them, do not so much displace the action as reconstitute it? What if they are action figures?³ What interests me is not only the action within the poem's rhetorical figures but also the sorts of interactions they have with their context. In a sense, an action figure reveals the language of the poem to be an aspect of the plot, each in some measure shaping—and even transforming—the other.

One of the figures that has received a great deal of attention is *syneciosis*, what Puttenham calls the “cross-couple” and what we would ordinarily call an oxymoron or paradox.⁴ Examples from the poem include “liveless life” (l. 1374) or “helpless help” (l. 1056), the two words in each case working at cross purposes or seeming to cancel each other out.⁵ They illuminate, in particular, the central dilemma of the poem's main character who turns to suicide as a way of coping with rape. As a strategy, it seems like a particularly disempowering form of “help.” Lucrece may achieve an ever-living fame but only at the cost of her own life. And these paradoxes lie at the heart of debates about the meaning of rape and suicide as Shakespeare presents them and, indeed, as they had been presented by Ovid and Livy earlier.

A rather different example of *syneciosis* or cross-couple appears right at the beginning of the poem, which plunges into the action in *medias res*, after the Roman soldiers have settled their bet about the relative virtues of their wives. Tarquin, “being enflamed with Lucrece's beauty” and, no doubt, with envy of Collatine's luck, bolts for Collatium:

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
And girdle with embracing flames the waist
Of Collatine's fair love, Lucrece the chaste.⁶ (ll. 1–7)

A “lightless fire” has a strongly paradoxical quality about it (what sort of fire has no light?), and the epithet clearly also serves the purposes of bombast, the stuffing

of bombastic verse regularly depending on such bi-syllabic adjectives as “lightless” to inflate a flat tetrameter line to the greater glory of a mighty pentameter. The fire of Tarquin’s lust, of course, is lightless because he dissembles or disguises it, hides it, as the figure has it, in “pale embers.” But the figure is radically unstable or dynamic in a way that leads me to call it an action figure. Within two lines the image of this lightless fire blazes into full view, a figure of Tarquin’s aim to “girdle with embracing flames” the object of his lust. The extraordinary verb “girdle” captures both the constrained personal intimacy of rape in its private signification and also the more military and public suggestion of a besieging army surrounding a city with destructive fire. The figure has the remarkable vividness or activity, *energia*, that Aristotle celebrated as characteristic of the finest sort of metaphor, in which “something seems living through being actualized.”⁷

A second element that makes this an action figure is the sense in which this energy exceeds the intention and understanding of the character to which it primarily refers. The hyperbole seems to have a life of its own (which contrives to make it feel less hyperbolic than it would otherwise seem). A strong secondary significance of the word “lightless” is the sense of being unenlightened, incomprehensible, irrational. Tarquin is here as much (or more) an object than an independent agent. He is “borne” by “trustless wings,” and he is, in a remarkable epithet, “lust-breathed”; that is, he is animated by lust. Lust, in other words, is a component of his soul every bit as much as an emotion of the body. And it is fair to say, therefore, that the “lightless fire” bears him as much as he it. To say this is not in any way to exonerate Tarquin or to excuse him from responsibility but to highlight an important aspect of the nature of the action he initiates.

The military associations of several of the poem’s hyperboles are at their most striking at the moment of the actual rape—the moment when Tarquin first places his hand on the breast of Lucrece. In an extraordinary simile, Tarquin’s “veins” (l. 427) are said to be like disorderly soldiers, fighting for “pillage” (l. 428) and delighting in “bloody death and ravishment” (l. 430):

Anon his beating heart, alarum striking,
Gives the hot charge, and bids them [i.e., his veins] do their liking.

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. (ll. 433–41)

Katharine Eisaman Maus, analyzing the relation of language and violence in the poem, has argued persuasively that it works by repeatedly actualizing the violence that is frequently present in the conventions of Petrarchan love poetry, which treats love as war and lovers as soldiers. What is metaphorical in the lyric tradition becomes literally—and horrifically—true, literally realized, in this narrative poem. Of this particular passage, she asks, “What is happening when Tarquin compares himself to an army scaling Lucrece’s fort,” and her answers include the idea that such metaphors render his moral choice “plausible” and that the attraction of the military metaphor is that “it allows Tarquin to depict a rash and lawless act as coordinated and disciplined.”⁸ But of course it isn’t Tarquin who is doing the depicting here or who makes the comparison. These words belong to the narrator. This particular passage reveals more about the momentum of the action already in progress than about the rationalizations that set it in motion. If hyperbole is a figure of thought, the thought in this case belongs more to the author than to the character and is seen to be an aspect of plot. The hyperboles register what is happening.

It’s true that the figure of climax, what the rhetorician Thomas Wilson calls “gradation” or *gradatio* (“when we rehearse the word that goeth next before ... as though one should go up a pair of stairs and not leave till he come at the top”),⁹ gives the appearance of discipline and coordination, and therefore intensifies the military rhetoric, as the “heart cheers up his burning eye; / His eye commends the leading to his hand; / His hand as proud of such a dignity, / ... marched on.” But in fact, the military metaphor is already established as so conspicuously mindless that such mental operations as rationalization or plausibility seem oddly beside the point. The transposition of the “beating heart” into the yet more fiercely intensified “drumming heart” works to drown out or overwhelm the mind, and while it may look as if this heart is a sort of military general in charge of the operation, the reverse is nearer the truth: the heart instructs the veins to “do their liking” (l. 434). The body in charge is, to borrow from Colin Burrow’s annotation, “the lowest rank of soldiers who have abandoned the discipline of their formations, and who attempt to pick off booty or stray members of the enemy forces” and who therefore are licensed to pillage, rape, and kill.¹⁰ In a sort of reversal of normal physiology, the heart seems to be beating and drumming *because* of the blood pulsing in the veins and not the other way round.¹¹

At the moment when Tarquin begins his actual assault on Lucrece, the personification of veins continues, though now shifting from his to hers, and more

specifically to those in her bare breast, "Whose ranks of blue veins as his hand did scale / Left their round turrets destitute and pale" (ll. 440–41). However odd this image may seem, it extends the military metaphor from Tarquin to Lucrece, and it represents a counteraction, ineffectual to be sure but still a reaction. One of the interesting aspects of this moment is its pre-conscious character. It happens before Lucrece opens her eyes and before she has any conscious awareness of the nature of the assault, suggesting a kind of revulsion that is deep-seated, subconscious, and primal. And this point has an important bearing on questions about how to interpret or understand the effect of the rape on Lucrece, the way she copes (or fails to cope) with it through her decision to commit suicide. Commentators from Augustine onwards often write as if the issue is primarily a matter of how Lucrece *thinks* about things—what the rape means to her in terms of shame and honour or guilt and innocence, what she thinks about her duty to her husband and the state or the culture, what she fears about the possibility of having been impregnated, whether her thinking is pagan or Christian, patriarchal or independent, conformist or rebellious.¹² But underlying all of these considerations (and they are all serious and important) is the simple fact that the action of rape establishes some sort of connection between rapist and victim. And the victim may have more than a little difficulty dealing with that fact simply by thinking about it in one way or another. The action is what it is.

In this sense, Lucrece is a figure of *pathos*, the victim of a violent crime, and her *pathos* is clearly one of the central things that recommended the story to Shakespeare. His major additions to the material he inherited (a matter of some 846 lines) all contrive to give voice to the sufferings of Lucrece. But before considering examples of this rhetoric, I want to add a note on central paradoxical features in the definition of *pathos* itself and why this particular term resists easy translation from Greek into English. Though it is commonly rendered as "suffering," there is equally good reason to regard it as a form of "action," at least in terms of the short paragraph that Aristotle devotes to it in the *Poetics*. George Whalley comments on the difficulties in his edition of that work.

Pathos (from *paschein*, 'suffer') primarily means something 'suffered,' something that happens to a person—the complement to something done. Yet Aristotle says that a *pathos* is a *praxis*, an 'act.' [...] The paradoxical term *pathos-as-praxis* seems to imply that the crucial event is to be seen both as suffered and as inflicted. Aristotle's choice of the word *praxis*—which he regularly uses elsewhere of the single overarching tragic action as distinct from the separate *pragmata* (events) of which the *praxis* is composed—suggests further that the *pathos* as an event is both pregnant and determinate, the beginning of a process. *Peripeteia* and 'recognition' heighten and

concentrate emotional force: *pathos* is the key event / act that provides substantial foundation and focus for the *peripeteia* and recognition.¹³

For these reasons, Whalley translates *pathos* as “a murderous or cruel transaction” and explains that he has rendered *praxis* in this context “as a ‘transaction’ in order to indicate the *pathos*-action paradox and to preserve the processive potential of the word *praxis*.”¹⁴

The *pathos* of Lucrece, as Shakespeare conceived it (or so I believe), is a good illustration of this sort of *pathos*-action paradox. Her rape is not simply an isolated event (in Whalley’s sense of that term), which is passively suffered, but an overarching *praxis*, which will eventually also include her suicide. Still, it has to be admitted that the lengthy series of apostrophes to Night (ll. 764–806), to Collatine (ll. 834–47), to Opportunity (ll. 876–924), and to Time (ll. 925–96), in which she registers her complaints and her suffering, have a static quality that seems the reverse of dramatic. F.T. Prince puts the case against the rhetoric of Lucrece in fairly harsh terms, though he is perhaps only expressing bluntly what many other readers feel in one degree or another: “she is forced to express herself in a way which dissipates the real *pathos* of her situation”; “her sufferings become sensational and not tragic”; “the greatest weakness of Shakespeare’s Lucrece is therefore her remorseless eloquence”; and “after her violation, Lucrece loses our sympathy exactly in proportion as she gives tongue.” Prince goes on to argue that

The most moving passages are those in which she is silent, or nearly so: the interviews with the maid and with the groom. Here we are shown her grief momentarily from without, or indirectly, checked by social circumstance. These scenes are ... a true equivalent in narrative form of Shakespeare’s dramatic vision, a fusion of dialogue, action, and description. Lucrece’s lengthy self-expression in other passages is *apparently* dramatic, but the conditions of the stage would soon have revealed its absurdity.¹⁵

Some readers, and especially some of the most recent and astute critics of the poem, would be more than a little nervous or wary about arguing that a rape victim loses our sympathy precisely because—and to the extent that—she grows articulate, but it might seem that Prince is on more solid ground when he argues that the rhetorical set pieces in this poem are inherently undramatic. If Shakespeare, on holiday from the theatre for a year or two, is looking for an equivalent in narrative form of his quintessentially dramatic vision, then he found it only intermittently in those few scenes that feature “social circumstance” in a way that is familiar and typical of the theatre.

But it is arguable that social circumstance is not the only means of accessing or of generating something fairly to be called a dramatic vision. In fact, as I have

been arguing, the sort of action figure that is manifest in at least certain moments of even the most rhetorical of speeches shows an interest in drama that, if not exactly made for the conditions of the stage, is not without dramatic interest. Since the very form of the complaints that Prince objects to is the apostrophe, it is worth noting that Early Modern definitions of that figure highlight a form of action in a way that modern definitions have mostly expelled. A modern definition of apostrophe emphasizes only a certain mode of address: "to either an absent person or to an abstract or non-human identity."¹⁶ Early Modern definitions, by contrast, add to this something more significantly dynamic, a dramatic edge suggested, for example, by Puttenham's picturesque synonym for apostrophe, "the turn-tale": "Many times when we have run a long race in our tale spoken to the hearers, we do suddenly fly out, and either speak or exclaim at some other person or thing. And therefore the Greeks call such a figure (as we do) 'the turn-way' or the 'turn-tale', and breedeth by such exchange a certain recreation to the hearer's minds."¹⁷

Lucrece, of course, is seeking for a certain recreation in her own mind, and she finds it (or seems to) in her sequence of apostrophes, which allow her at least the relief of projecting her feelings onto the abstractions of Night, Opportunity, and the rest. Eventually, however, she herself recognizes the futility of this method ("In vain I rail at Opportunity, / At Time, at Tarquin, and uncheerful Night" [ll. 1023–24]), and she condemns these apostrophes (in terms more harsh than Prince's) as purely verbal and therefore ineffectual: "Out, idle words, servants to shallow fools, / Unprofitable sounds, weak arbitrators" (ll. 1016–17). What's interesting to note is that this attack on apostrophe is itself couched in the form of an apostrophe, as she turns from addressing the personified abstractions to apostrophizing her words, her "idle words," themselves.

Like Hamlet, who excoriates himself for indulging in bombast when what he needs (or thinks he needs) is action, Lucrece castigates herself for giving way to words which do not offer the remedy she seeks: "This helpless smoke of words doth me no right. / The remedy indeed to do me good / Is to let forth my foul defiled blood" (1027–29). The apostrophe to her "idle words," itself an action in Puttenham's sense, a sudden flying out, a turning from the "long race" of the tale of her complaint, signals as well the transition to a further action, the determination to commit suicide. And even here the action is carried forward by means of an apostrophe, as she turns from addressing her idle words to addressing her own hand.

Poor hand, why quiver'st thou at this decree?
Honour thyself to rid me of this shame;
For, if I die, my honour lives in thee,

But if I live, thou liv'st in my defame.
 Since thou could not defend thy loyal dame,
 And wast afraid to scratch her wicked foe,
 Kill both thyself and her for yielding so. (ll. 1030–36)

The question that accompanies the address to the hand calls up, once more, the pathos of Lucrece's predicament, the more pointedly so in that the action the hand is summoned to perform is very clearly an instance of *pathos-as-praxis*. Lucrece also begins to give reasons for why she should commit suicide, reasons that will lead to further disputations with herself and grow yet more complex as the poem proceeds; but among the most important of reasons here is the simple desire for action. The hand that was paralyzed at the moment of crisis, that was afraid to "scratch her wicked foe," must now undertake the only remedy that seems available. Whatever reasons the mind may have (either for or against the necessity of suicide), the body seems to have its own reasons. And in this poem, obscurely perhaps but also inexorably, these need to be acted out in the flesh.

Still, there are many problems with this sort of action. How independent can it be, if the rapist sets the terms and conditions? The idea of *pathos-as-praxis* may seem to allow the sufferer some scope for independent agency, but does that agency consist in anything more than enduring or living out (or dying for) the crimes of the violator? Lucrece herself worries that in deciding to commit suicide she will be merely finishing the actions and intentions of Tarquin:

'In vain,' quoth she, 'I live, and seek in vain
 Some happy mean to end a hapless life.
 I feared by Tarquin's falchion to be slain,
 Yet for the self-same purpose seek a knife. (ll. 1044–47)

The rhetorical figure in line 1044 is *epanalepsis*, or in Puttenham's words, "the Echo Sound" or the "Slow Return,"¹⁸ the repetition of "in vain" registering Lucrece's claustrophobic sense of circularity and confinement, the sense she elaborates by envisioning her suicide as merely completing Tarquin's threat, fulfilling *his* action rather than acting on her own and for herself—a slow return and a vain one at that.

To investigate this problem adequately it is necessary to look more closely at the nature of Tarquin's action and at the choices that constitute and confirm it. He is certainly bent on fulfilling his desires from the outset, but exactly at what point he decides that these must be accomplished by means of rape is harder to determine. Even as he approaches Lucrece's bedchamber he seems divided against himself, staging an inner debate or "disputation / 'Tween frozen conscience and hot burning will" (ll. 246–7). The narrator comments on this self-division in a stanza that

makes impressive use of the figure of *epizeuxis*, the emphatic repetition of a word with no other words between:

Such hazard now must doting Tarquin make,
Pawning his honour to obtain his lust,
And for himself himself he must forsake.
Then where is truth if there be no self-trust?
When shall he think to find a stranger just,
When he himself himself confounds, betrays
To sland'rous tongues and wretched hateful days? (ll. 155–61)

The double use of *epizeuxis* here is particularly noteworthy, intensifying the action from a simple forsaking to a yet more serious confounding and betraying. And this doubling is itself further intensified by the form of the rhyme royal stanza, moving from the alternate rhymes of its first half to the more intense couplet rhymes of the second half, the completeness of the betrayal underscored finally by the enjambment of lines 160 and 161 and the finality of couplet closure. The nature of Tarquin's self-betrayal is also caught by the special nature of the action of the rhetorical figure, an action suggested by another of Puttenham's interesting English equivalents: "The Greeks," he says, "call him *epizeuxis*, the Latins *subjunctio*; we may call him the Underlay." Whigham and Rebhorn comment on this translation: "Whereas *epizeuxis* means a "yoking or fastening upon," its Latin equivalent, *subjunctio*, means a "yoking under," which may explain why Puttenham Englishes the figure as the "Underlay."¹⁹ The repetition of "himself" in the poem may be seen in this light, then, as not simply an alignment of two more or less equal selves but as an acting out of the triumph of one self over another, which is yoked under.

In Tarquin's case it is the triumph of the body or his blood, his "hot burning will," over his "frozen conscience" or his honour and his "inward mind" (l. 185). But the triumph is short-lived, as the poem makes clear by focusing on its consequences for Tarquin immediately following the act of rape:

So fairs it with this faultful lord of Rome,
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 troupes of cares,
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
 To living death and pain perpetual,
 Which in her prescience she controlled still,
 But her foresight could not forestall their will. (ll.715–28)

Among the remarkable things about this passage is the personification of Tarquin's soul as female, a rhetorical figure which has the effect of not merely analyzing but of dramatizing the consequences for Tarquin. It's interesting, too, that he is represented so immediately as the victim of his own crime. In the words of Colin Burrow, "Tarquin's soul is presented as a female ruler of a town under siege, whose defilement is described in terms which could be used of Lucrece. This establishes a shocking affinity between the supposed victor and his victim."²⁰ If one of the problems of *pathos-as-praxis* is the question of what scope the process could possibly allow for independent agency on the part of the sufferer, it would seem that the same problem can apply, in turn, as well to the one who inflicts the suffering. And this is a shocking affinity.

Another remarkable thing about the stanzas that register the plight of Tarquin's soul is the way they simultaneously depend on a distinction between body and soul and yet modify or qualify that distinction. The soul is at odds with the members of the body, her prescience opposed to their will, and yet the consequences of the action apply equally to the body and the soul. When the body, which is the soul's "fair temple," is "defaced" that action has immediate consequences for the soul, bringing her "immortality" under the thrall of "living death and pain perpetual." So the separation of body and soul which Tarquin originally thought possible and which he used in order to justify his action turns out not to be the case.²¹ And that it never really was the case may be established by looking yet more closely at the precise moment when Tarquin commits himself to the rape, the moment he declares "Affection is my captain" (l. 271) and "Desire my pilot is, beauty my prize" (l. 279).

By regarding beauty as a "prize" that he may seize upon, he turns Lucrece into an object, a "treasure" that is his for the taking, and he is thus enabled to regard the rape or seizure as evidence of his own prowess and power. But his objectification of Lucrece is a radically reductive simplification of his own experience of her in the very instant before he makes his fatal decision. There, still in the midst of his inner disputation with himself, he recollects the reception he received from her in her role as hostess:

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
 Where her beloved Collatinus lies.
 O how her fear did make her colour 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
 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.' (ll. 253–63)

The image of “her hand in my hand” is an example of the figure called *ploche*: the “sort of repetition which we call the Doubler, ... a speedy iteration of one word, but with some little intermission, by inserting one or two words between.” And as Puttenham's editors note, the word “*Ploche* means “weaving.”²² In articulating this weaving of hands, Tarquin also registers the kind of excitement the memory of the experience stirs in him. Burrow suggests that it is “as though Tarquin is surreptitiously imagining her to be responding to the potential eroticism of the moment when they clasp hands.”²³ This suggestion seems headed in the right direction—Tarquin's imaginings are certainly surreptitious—but in the action of the figure the eroticism is not merely potential but actual, or reactivated. He felt it when she first took his hand, and he feels it again now in memory. It is an erotic excitement that effectively concludes his “disputation” and leads directly into the unwavering commitment to rape, “Affection is my captain” and so forth. Tarquin's motives are sometimes described as primarily rooted in a sense of rivalry with Collatine or in his sense of the public worth of Lucrece's beauty, as registered in the published account of it, her “blazon.”²⁴ Such motives are, of course, present in his thinking (and very powerfully so), but the climactic motive, the one that seals his decision, is his memory of this moment of erotic contact with the body of Lucrece herself.²⁵ And he is able to make that decision only by construing the significance of that contact in a reductive and perverse way, as if it were only a matter of the meeting of bodies and of taking possession of a material object.

The character of Lucrece, by contrast, in this moment of interwoven hands is anything but reductive or perverse. It is not, for her, an erotic moment—and she is not in the least responsible for any of his surreptitious imaginings—but it is a moment of high emotion. She gives her hand to the man she believes to be her husband's friend, extending hospitality (as Hermione does in similar though not identical circumstances in *The Winter's Tale*) and eagerly anticipating news of her husband's well-being, trembling with “loyal fear” until secure in the knowledge

that he is safe. The image of her trembling hand combines with the image of the colour rising in her face, first “red as roses” and then “white as lawn” to dramatize her ardour for Collatine. The imagery of “red” and “white” often has a rather static quality in Petrarchan poetry—and just as often a fundamentally heraldic or stylized significance (as it frequently does in this poem)—but in this particular context the images are dynamic, active, registering the movement of blood into and away from her face. And her colouring, like her trembling hand, gives an equally vivid sense of the body of Lucrece and of the spirit or soul that animates it. This sense of wholeness or harmony between body and soul is worth recalling when we come, once more, to consider the question of suicide, but it’s also worth considering, here, that the harmony of body and soul in the character of Lucrece, at this fraught moment, is a sign of love. Her love, of course, is focused on her husband, but it also has a broader significance, as Tarquin also recognizes (or half recognizes) when he declares that Lucrece offered him “so sweet a cheer / That had Narcissus seen her as she stood / Self-love had never drowned him in the flood” (ll. 264–66). By opting, even in the face of this recognition, for his own version of self-love, his “Affection,” his “desire,” Tarquin violates not only the bonds of political and domestic order but also the bonds of reason and love, as well as a wholeness of body and soul of which he has just had first-hand experience.²⁶ That is the sort of *praxis*, the overarching action, which he shapes—and is shaped by.

And given the circumstances of *his* action and its consequences, what sort of action, or initiative, is available to Lucrece? Like several other critics of the poem, Coppelia Kahn thinks that there is really none at all. The struggle between Tarquin and Lucrece, she argues, registers “*his* subjectivity rather than her own.” The problem, as she understands it, lies in the patriarchal world that is the basis of social order in Shakespeare’s England:

There as in the Rome of the poem, it is men who rape women and patriarchal constructions of gender and power that enable rape Yet the poem fascinates and moves me precisely because Shakespeare, I believe, tries to fashion Lucrece as a subject not totally tuned to the key of Roman chastity and patriarchal marriage and to locate a position in which he as a poet might stand apart from those values as well. He fails, but his attempt reveals how narrowly the rhetorical traditions within which he works are bounded by an ideology of gender in which women speak with the voices of men.²⁷

These remarks are candid and astute. The poem does seem bounded by an ideology of gender, the more powerfully so given that its context is both English and Roman, and it could hardly divest itself of the principal elements of the story—suicide as a

response to rape and the heroine as an exemplum of chastity. And yet Kahn's fascination (which I share) arises in part from a sense that Shakespeare brings something original to the story. Her concluding judgment that "he fails" has the special virtue of raising a series of critical questions. What, exactly, would constitute success in these circumstances, and is there any intermediate ground between success and failure? Would Shakespeare succeed only if he were to offer a complete and systematic overhaul of the "rhetorical traditions within which he works"? Would the poem succeed only if it were to offer a new vision of civilization and of the demands and expectations any civilized order places on women, as well as men?

The comprehensive and elevated criteria implied by such questions are scarcely less ambitious and all-embracing than the claims that early modern rhetoricians routinely make about the power of rhetoric and poetry. Here is Puttenham, for example, on the civilizing power of the poets:

Finally because they did altogether endeavor themselves to reduce the life of man to a certain method of good manners and made the first differences between virtue and vice, and then tempered all these knowledges and skills with the exercise of a delectable music by melodious instruments, which withal served them to delight their hearers and to call the people together by admiration to a plausible and virtuous conversation, therefore were they the first philosophers ethic and the first artificial musicians of the world.²⁸

Puttenham, like Kahn, clearly believes that if poets are to live up to their high calling as being foremost among ethical philosophers, they must be able to stand apart somewhat from the values of the age and make original distinctions between virtue and vice. And they must "temper" or combine these distinctions properly, so as to "call the people together." Whigham and Rebhorn alert us to the subtle shifts in meaning that apparently commonplace words can undergo by referring no fewer than eight terms in this short passage to their Glossary. "Conversation" is one of the important ones, which they say means "social interaction" in this context, but even more important for my purposes is the word "plausible": "(plausibly) acceptable, credible, praiseworthy, pleasing."²⁹

The word encapsulates several of the most important criteria for establishing the success of a poem. It is praiseworthy and pleasing, in part, by being credible and believable (coherent and consistent) but also by being "acceptable," advancing, as it were, the cause of good manners and morals. The success, or partial success, of *The Rape of Lucrece*, has less to do with a comprehensive and cataclysmic paradigm shift, a drastic revision of several rhetorical traditions all at once, and much more to do with the series of rhetorical explorations that constitute what I am calling

action figures. Shakespeare's originality in this poem is not *a priori* or something planned out beforehand, but opportunistic and exploratory, discovering hidden reserves of life and liveliness in his figures (both in his characters and in his figures of speech). It remains to be seen whether there is enough "method" in these various and individual moments to create a consistent picture, to "call the people together" and bring us to a new understanding of the larger course of the action, to re-tune the key (as Kahn puts it) of "Roman chastity and patriarchal marriage."³⁰

To return once more to one of those local moments I have been commenting on, the moment when Shakespeare injects new life into such conventional figures as the trembling hand and the red and white cheeks to actualize in Lucrece what I have called (and what Tarquin perceives as) love. Such a moment has consequences for the nature of the resistance Lucrece may offer to her rapist. Tarquin threatens her with physical violence but even more with the promise that, if she resists, he will rape her anyway, kill her, place her body in bed with "some rascal groom" (l. 671), kill him too, and then claim that he executed them both because of their adulterous embrace. What this more invidious threat seems to mean is that resistance would disgrace the honour of Lucrece and Collatine even more surely and swiftly than submission. Coppelia Kahn argues that

This threat takes its force from the entire Roman ideology of male honor and female chastity. Tarquin is spurred to possess Lucrece by his competitive, agonistic Roman mentality even more than by her beauty *per se*. He wants her because she is Collatine's, and therefore every indication of her chastity—that is, her husband's rights over her body, which she affirms—paradoxically increase his desire. Nonetheless, to judge from this threat (which Shakespeare takes from Livy and Ovid), he appears to understand her chastity from her point of view as well as his. He sees that she has perfectly identified herself with her husband, as the seal of his honor, and therefore will not risk resisting Tarquin because it would dishonor Collatine. To save her husband, Tarquin guesses, she is sure to yield herself.³¹

These comments are very perceptive, especially with respect to Tarquin, but there is still more to say about Lucrece. There is no question that her sense of chastity includes a sense of her husband's rights and a sense that she is identified with him, but it also includes something more: a sense of her own integrity, especially as that manifests itself in love. In Livy and Ovid, Tarquin may have to guess that Lucrece, with a good Roman matron's sense of being the seal of her husband's honour, will yield herself. What is original with Shakespeare is that his guess moves much closer to a certainty: Shakespeare's Tarquin *knows* that Shakespeare's Lucrece will act out of love as well as honour. And if this is true, her passivity (if that is indeed what Shakespeare shows) in the very instant of her rape is, in a very powerful way, an

action and an expression of her own particular subjectivity.³² The *pathos* of Lucrece, even at the moment of her violation, is a *praxis*.

Much of the lengthy interval which occurs between her decision to commit suicide and the arrival of her husband and the Roman lords from Ardea is taken up with her contemplation of a "skillful painting made for Priam's Troy" (l. 1367), an episode which, as has often been noted, "gives Shakespeare's second narrative poem epic resonances"³³ and which also, therefore, gives some indication of how Lucrece herself regards the nature and scope of her *praxis*. Insofar as she searches the painting for images of sorrow or suffering equivalent to her own—and finds this particularly in the representation of Hecuba—the episode renders her *pathos* as primarily a matter of emotion or feeling, *pathos* in the pathetic sense, and it seems to perform a function similar to the apostrophes to Night, Opportunity, and Time, seeking relief from suffering by projecting it onto something external to herself. But her exercise in *ecphrasis* has a still more dynamic function, a more interactive relation with the painting than mere projection: "So Lucrece, *set a-work*, sad tales doth tell / To penciled pensiveness and coloured sorrow; / She lends them words, and she their looks doth borrow" (ll. 1496–98; my italics). And this interaction with the painting, this working with it, leads her finally to the image of Sinon, at which point the *ecphrasis*, the verbal description of the painting, comes most fully alive as an action figure.

With Sinon, the traitor whose lies brought the Trojan horse within the walls of Troy, Lucrece offers not simply a description but a process of assessment and re-assessment, as she attempts to reconcile the fairness and mildness the painter has bestowed on his outward form with the manifest treachery of his action.

'It cannot be,' quoth she, 'that so much guile—'
 She would have said 'can lurk in such a look,'
 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.

'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 armed to beguile
 With outward honesty, but yet defiled
 With inward vice: as Priam him did cherish
 So did I Tarquin, so my Troy did perish.' (ll. 1534–47)

The action of re-interpretation is beautifully rendered in the first of the two stanzas quoted here, fully dramatic in the centrality it gives to direct speech and in the complete reversal of the opinion it develops, and the revised assessment is the more emphatic on account of the greater intensity of the second half of the rhyme royal stanza form. And the activity of this stanza does more than identify Sinon with Tarquin: its movement re-enacts the progress or development of her understanding of the character of Tarquin. The stanza also shows, incidentally, how powerfully the interpretation of a work of art is coloured by personal experience. But the focus on Sinon as the climactic figure in the whole long *ecphrastic* episode is, nonetheless, far from arbitrary or forced, nor is its significance limited to showing Lucrece as merely the victim of treachery and betrayal.³⁴

Her conclusion—"so my Troy did perish"—does indeed illustrate how completely she sees her own domestic tragedy as subsumed under the larger political and military order; but by identifying herself with Priam in this extended analogy, she is also making certain claims about her own active role in the total action.³⁵ As Priam had cherished Sinon, so she has cherished Tarquin, both of them acting out of a warm human sympathy for apparent weariness, mildness, grief, and travail. Neither is responsible for the violence that ensues, but in both cases the decisive act of welcoming the traitor plays a material part in bringing about the tragic destruction that follows, the tragedy all the more intense for the nobility and humanity of the motives that are swept into its momentum. By means of the action of *ecphrasis*, Shakespeare depicts a Lucrece who, in identifying with Priam as well as Hecuba, articulates an ideology not wholly bounded by gender roles but free to speak for the humanity of both men and women.³⁶ In this sense, his lengthy addition to the Roman story of his sources brings something new into play.³⁷ His appeal to the matter of Troy is one of the things that gives his story a more than Roman significance, a move that helps to explain, in part, why the conclusion of *Lucrece*, highlighting the political meaning of the tale, with the overthrow of the Tarquins and the establishment of the Roman republic, seems a bit of an anti-climax in Shakespeare's poem.³⁸

The figure of Sinon, however, also provokes Lucrece to interact with the "skilful painting" in a quite literal and physical sense as "She tears the senseless Sinon with her nails, / Comparing him to that unhappy guest / Whose deed hath made herself herself detest" (ll. 1564–66). The self-division reflected in the *epizeuxis* here—herself herself—recalls in a very precise way the self-division of Tarquin (himself himself), and raises once more the critical question of the extent to which her subjectivity is determined by his. And nowhere is this question more pressing or crucial than in the climax of the poem, the moment of her actual suicide. She sets the stage quite

carefully for this climax, and does so in a way that is fully dramatic, playing out her final moments before an assembled company which includes her husband, her father, and the Roman lords who eventually, led by Brutus, will carry out the revenge she has already solicited. She begins the action of her final scene by asking them how the “stain” she has suffered might be removed:

‘What is the quality of my offence,
Being constrained with dreadful circumstance?
May my pure mind with the foul act dispense,
My low-declined honor to advance?
May any terms acquit me from this chance?
The poisoned fountain clears itself again,
And why not I from this compelled stain?’

With this they all at once began to say
Her body’s stain her mind untainted clears,
While, with a joyless smile, she turns away
That 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.’

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,
She utters this: ‘He, he, fair lords, ’tis he
That guides this hand to give this wound to me.’ (ll. 1702–22)

The figure of *aposiopesis*, of interruption or silence, which registers her inability to speak Tarquin’s name, brings it all the more forcefully to the fore, charging the reader and the narrator and (presumably) the assembled lords to supply it, or rather to re-supply it, since she has already thrown it forth once but cannot do so again.³⁹ In any case, the name and its associated pronoun resound throughout the last stanza here, suggesting that Tarquin is, once again, the primary actor (even in his absence) and that his subjectivity, at this climactic moment is, indeed, ruling hers, his hand guiding hers.

Yet the dramatic aspect of this moment, the fact that Lucrece is playing to a group of spectators, shaping *their* understanding of the action as well as her own, generates a strong impression of agency on her part. As John Roe puts it, commenting on the shocked reaction of husband and father to this moment, “Collatine

and Lucretius are inadequate not because they selfishly cultivate their own grief, even if this is what they do, but because helplessness is what is expected of them: theirs is the role of the traditionally grieving chorus, powerless to assist the main tragic figure.”⁴⁰ The drama places Lucrece at the centre of the action, and Roe seems to me right to claim that she is a “tragic figure.” Still, it could be argued (and has been argued) that she is tragic precisely because she so thoroughly assimilates a patriarchal ideology founded on a notion of female chastity and honour that *requires* her death, even if the men who are present in the poem at this moment do not. On this reading, her tragedy is that she succumbs to a cultural imperative that finally effaces her and silences her.

At the heart of this critical debate lies one of the last of the action figures I wish to consider, namely, the figure of the rhetorical question, what Puttenham calls “*Erotema*, or the Questioner”: “There is a kind of figurative speech when we ask many questions and look for none answer, speaking indeed by interrogation which we might as well say by affirmation.”⁴¹ Part of what makes this an action figure in Shakespeare’s handling of it is the way the questions oscillate between being rhetorical and real. In the first of the three stanzas quoted above, Lucrece asks no fewer than four questions. The first is certainly a real question, perhaps the central question of the poem: “What is the quality of my offense?”⁴² The next three would appear to be rhetorical, each implying that an affirmative answer is obvious: yes, your pure mind may dispense with the foul act and reinstate your honour; yes, there are terms that would acquit you from this chance; and yes, you may be cleared of this compelled stain. And the male spectators to whom these questions are addressed certainly respond as if the questions were rhetorical and the answers obviously “yes.” She has spoken by interrogation what she might as well have said by affirmation, but her rhetorical method is much the more impressive in that it summons the affirmation from the audience.⁴³

But Lucrece has a different answer in mind: “No, no”! Why is this? In one sense the questions that the Roman lords receive as rhetorical may be thought to have been issued as real; that is, they may not have been intended as rhetorical, since for her they have a kind of burning on-going life. Yet Lucrece would seem to want it both ways. She intentionally elicits their affirmation—and its whole-hearted vindication of her—before she countermands it with her own condemnation of herself. And this dual purpose may well account for the striking example of *syneciosis*, the “joyless smile” that occurs in the middle stanza immediately following their affirmative response. The “smile” is a smile of satisfaction at having elicited the response she craves, even while it is rendered “joyless” in the more intimate knowledge of the

contradictory answer she is about to deliver for herself. And yet these two responses do not simply cancel each other out. Hoskins defines *syneciosis* "as a composition of contraries, and by both words intimateth the meaning of neither precisely but a moderation and mediocrity of both; as, *bravery* and *rags* are contrary, yet somewhat better than both is *brave raggedness*."⁴⁴ In a similar way, the "joyless smile" of Lucrece seems designed to hold together a composition of contraries, to be in some sort a middle way or moderation between two antithetical extremes.⁴⁵

But then the question arises, is it a better way? Since that question, in a broad sense, has now generated several centuries of debate, there can be no quick or ready answer. Yet it is possible to see why this composition of contraries seems better to Shakespeare's Lucrece. She is not prepared to accept the radical separation of body and mind which lies at the heart of the vindication offered by the Roman lords (and which continues to be offered in the critical discussion of her actions).⁴⁶ Her sense of chastity is not simply a matter of sexual purity but of integrity—and not only the integrity of love and honour but also of body and soul. If her final argument in favour of suicide seems pre-occupied with the question of her reputation ("No dame hereafter living / By my excuse shall claim excuse's giving"), that is not primarily because she thirsts after fame but because she refuses to compromise her integrity with an "excuse," a rationalization which, artificially separating body and soul, compromises the integrity it would defend. Her "joyless smile" is both a response to the answers given to her rhetorical questions and a prelude to her own final speech, and it is not simply a physiological response. In a way, to invoke a famous line from John Donne, "one might almost say, her body thought." The smile is itself a sign of the interdependence of body and soul—a composition of contraries, a cross-coupling—on which Lucrece rests her final case.⁴⁷

How forceful or coherent that case is thought to be is itself the subject of ongoing debate. Ian Donaldson, like Coppelia Kahn, raises the fundamental critical issue of the poem's success or failure and, like her though for different reasons, doubts the success. He argues that in shifting between Roman and Christian ways of thought, the narrative reveals "a basic indecisiveness over the story's central moral issues" and that "Shakespeare introduces a fatal element of moral uncertainty into the poem itself."⁴⁸ In his view, "two conflicting ethics are in evidence": on the one hand, Lucrece thinks in terms of "a shame culture. She worries about 'disgrace' and 'helpless shame,' about the searching eyes and opinions of other people," and "this way of thought takes her naturally in the direction of suicide." On the other hand, she also thinks in terms of "a guilt culture," imbuing her with a Christian sensibility, "which will lead her in due course to doubt the wisdom of

suicide.”⁴⁹ She seems “almost to anticipate Augustine’s objection that a woman who kills herself after rape puts her immortal soul in jeopardy.”⁵⁰ Caught in the middle of these seemingly irreconcilable positions, Lucrece, he argues, “seems unsure of the moral consequences both of rape and of suicide, hesitantly debating her way towards death.”⁵¹ Donaldson’s commentary here is focused especially on her earlier meditation on suicide (ll. 1156–75) in which Lucrece certainly does waver between thinking, on the one hand, that killing herself would pollute her soul and, on the other, that with the body already polluted, the corruption of the soul is inevitable.

But Donaldson’s assessment of her uncertainty in the middle of the poem does not extend to its climax—there she is nothing if not sure of herself and anything but hesitant. Moreover, the authority she exhibits in acting out the drama of her final scene raises fundamental questions about jurisdiction.⁵² Who is qualified to judge her case, and on what basis?⁵³ To the extent that she manages and shapes the matter of jurisdiction, even in the sorrow and suffering of her suicide, Lucrece plays a decisive role, albeit not the only role, in the action of the poem’s climax. Here again, her *pathos* is a *praxis*. It may be true that in dividing the jurisdictions of men and women and in allotting different criteria to each group, Lucrece (and Shakespeare along with her) fails to harmonize the demands of a guilt culture and a shame culture, though a representation of conflicting ethical codes may indicate something more than simply a moral impasse. And it may be equally true that Shakespeare “does not take moral repossession of the older story, confidently charging it with new depth and intricacy of significance” with anything approaching the mastery he will achieve in his later drama.⁵⁴ But it also may be doubted that even such accomplished works as *Hamlet* or *Lear* or *Othello*, for example, manage to reconcile fully the claims of honour and shame, guilt and innocence. While the later work is indubitably more dramatic than *Lucrece*, it is the successes as well as the limitations of this early work that make possible the more profound explorations of the later drama.

In those places where *Lucrece* is charged with *energeia*, with activity, with the drama and energy of its action figures, the poem achieves a significance that will continue to resonate throughout the dramatist’s career. The editors of the most recent Arden edition of the poems remark that of the two narrative poems, “*Lucrece* appears to have lodged more deeply in Shakespeare’s creative memory. In addition to strong thematic parallels in *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, as well as the more proximate *Titus* ... powerful reminiscences of *Lucrece* figure in two late plays, *Macbeth* and *Cymbeline*.”⁵⁵ My own sense is that the reach of the poem extends even further: the possibilities for active initiative even in the midst of apparently passive

suffering—what is suggested by the enigmatic principle of *pathos-as-praxis*—would seem to underwrite such characters as Richard II, Ophelia, Lear, and Cordelia and such plays as *Measure for Measure* and *The Winter's Tale* and perhaps more besides.⁵⁶ By fusing rhetoric and action in *Lucrece*, Shakespeare learned invaluable lessons about embodied meaning and the coalescence of thought and action to which he returned throughout his career. In coining the term “action figure,” I have not meant to suggest that the narrative poem is in any fully or consistent way a dramatic work. It quite obviously is not. Nor is an action figure in any sense a technical term, or even a term that admits of a strict definition. It is mostly a convenience. Probably nearly any rhetorical figure could be treated as an action figure, even though some are more obviously active than others. The term is useful, however, as a tool which helps track the peculiar energy of Shakespeare's verse—and especially its moral energy—and of his fundamentally dramatic vision, and which challenges us to new estimations about what counts as success at his level. Even on holiday, this author puts the reader to work.

Notes

1. To say this is not to imply that the early plays are devoid of signs of literary ambition. For more on the various manifestations of that ambition see, for example, Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
2. A number of studies explore the relation of the poem to the more obviously dramatic works. See for examples, Harold R. Walley, “*The Rape of Lucrece* and Shakespearean Tragedy,” *PMLA* 76 (1961), pp. 480–87 and R. Thomas Simone, *Shakespeare and “Lucrece”: A Study of the Poem and its Relation to the Plays*, Salzburg Studies in English Literature 38 (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache, 1974). More recently, on the rhetorical side, William P. Weaver, “‘O teach me how to make mine own excuse’: Forensic Performance in *Lucrece*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 59 (2008), pp. 421–49, offers a detailed investigation of the traditions of forensic rhetoric and their relation to the final speech of the heroine. Weaver focuses in particular on the types of declamations known as *controversiae*, “orations modeled upon the accusation and defense in a criminal trial” (427). In a related way, Amy Greenstadt, “‘Read it in me’: The Author's Will in *Lucrece*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 57 (2006), pp. 45–70, discusses the powers of persuasive utterance and the oratorical skills which *Lucrece* discovers in the course of the narrative and which align her expression with that of “the author's unique voice” (49). Neither of these recent studies has drama (in the sense I mean to explore) as its principal concern, though both raise interesting questions about the theatricality of the narrative. The staged reading of the poem by the Taffety Punk Theatre Company for the 37th Annual Meeting of the Shakespeare Association of

America (Washington, DC, April 10, 2009) did a fine job of illustrating the incantatory and dramatic quality of its verse.

3. I coin this term for the sake of convenience, but it suggests itself quite naturally from some remarks by the most recent editors of George Puttenham, who argue that the English equivalents he finds for re-naming the Latin figures “actively connect the courtier-poet’s use of language to his behavior, to *agency*. Almost always, Puttenham’s Englishings invite the reader to imagine a person actually uttering the figure to another in some sort of localized social context.” They conclude, for example, that such dramatic characters as Marlowe’s Tamburlaine or Doctor Faustus “do not merely use hyperbole when they speak, but as ‘Overreachers’ they themselves are essentially hyperboles in action.” See Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn, ed., *The Art of English Poesy by George Puttenham: A Critical Edition* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 59. References to *The Art* are to this edition.
4. Puttenham, p. 291. The critics who treat *synciosis* as the most significant figure in the poem include Heather Dubrow, *Captive Victors: Shakespeare’s Narrative Poems and Sonnets* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 80–168; Joel Fineman, “Shakespeare’s Will: the Temporality of Rape,” *Representations* 20 (1987), pp. 25–76; and Catherine Belsey, “Tarquin Dispossessed: Expropriation and Consent in *The Rape of Lucrece*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52 (2001), pp. 315–35.
5. Heather Dubrow, in another major study of the poem, *Shakespeare and Domestic Loss: Forms of Deprivation, Mourning, and Recuperation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 45–61, focuses on burglary and loss and says of these two particular examples of *synciosis* that the phrases themselves “rob linguistically, taking away the word they seem to offer” (45).
6. Quotations from *Lucrece* are taken from William Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 239–338, and are cited by line numbers. Interestingly, Burrow gives the title of the poem at the beginning as *The Rape of Lucrece* and the running title as *Lucrece*, exactly reversing the procedure of the 1594 Quarto, which has *Lucrece* on the title page and *The Rape of Lucrece* as the running head. As Belsey observes, the latter emphasizes that “this is a poem about rape” and the former “that Lucrece is the protagonist of her own story” (315). Since I want to highlight something particular about the role of the protagonist, I choose the short version for my title, though of course both aspects need attention.
7. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 249.
8. “Taking Tropes Seriously: Language and Violence in Shakespeare’s *Rape of Lucrece*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37 (1986), pp. 72 and 68.
9. *The Art of Rhetoric* (1560), ed. Peter E. Medine (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 228.
10. Burrow, 267n.
11. In a related way, Henry v threatens the citizens of Harfleur with a vision of the time when his soldiers will be beyond his command: “in a moment look to see / The

- blind and bloody soldier with foul hand / Defile the locks of your shrill-shrieking daughters" (3.3.113–15), in *Henry V*, ed. Gary Taylor (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). Tarquin's veins, "blind and bloody," have reached that moment.
12. Saint Augustine argues that if chastity is "a quality of the mind, it is not lost when the body is violated"—*The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 27—and for him this means that if *Lucrece* is innocent, then her suicide is wrong.
 13. *Aristotle's Poetics: Translated & with a Commentary by George Whalley*, ed. John Baxter and Patrick Atherton (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), p. 90n112.
 14. *Aristotle's Poetics*, pp. 91 and 90n112.
 15. *Shakespeare: The Poems*, ed. F.T. Prince (London: Methuen, 1960), p. xxxvi.
 16. M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 8th ed. (Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005), p. 279.
 17. Puttenham, p. 323. Abraham Fraunce, *The Arcadian Rhetoric* [1588]: A Scolar Press Facsimile (Menston, England: The Scolar Press Limited, 1969), also emphasizes the action in *apostrophe*, a "turning away," to address a "person to whom it was not first prepared" (First Booke, Cap. 30). And John Hoskins, *Directions for Speech and Style*, ed. Hoyt H. Hudson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1935) is even more explicit than Puttenham and Fraunce about *apostrophe* as an action figure: "It is most convenient sometimes for the bringing in of life and luster to represent some unexpected strains beside the tenor of your tale, *and act, as it were, your meaning*" (47–8; my italics).
 18. Puttenham, p. 284.
 19. Puttenham, p. 285 and 285n27.
 20. Burrow, p. 283n.
 21. In considering the characters of Lovelace and Tarquin in "The Rape of Clarissa and *The Rape of Lucrece*: The Performance of Exemplarity and the Tragedy of Literary Allusion from Dramatic Poem to Dramatic Narrative," *English Studies in Italy* 20 (2007), pp. 581–602, Sylvia Greenup argues that "both men find it easier to make their decisions if they consider the body and soul as separate entities it helps both men to decline conscious responsibility for their actions" (591).
 22. Puttenham, p. 285 and 285n28.
 23. Burrow, p. 258n.
 24. See, for example, Nancy Vickers, "'The blazon of sweet beauty's best': Shakespeare's *Lucrece*" in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985): "The rapist returns obsessively to the narrator's five-line synopsis of Collatine's winning blazon; he locates motive in that initial fragmentary portrait" (107).
 25. Dubrow reaches a similar conclusion about this moment in the poem. Tarquin, she observes, "muses at some length on his putative victim's 'loyal fear' (l. 261) that her

husband has been killed. These reflections are succeeded immediately by his resolution to muster his courage and perform the rape,” and she remarks on the hints that “Tarquin finds Lucrece’s fears sexually attractive” (*Captive Victors*, p. 124). Whatever his initial motives, in other words, they are further complicated by his direct contact with his victim.

26. Dubrow is no doubt right about the way Tarquin responds to Lucrece’s fear, but in the way that that sadistic motive is then temporarily displaced by a recognition of how her love is the antithesis of his self-love, his final resolution is shown to be even more perverse, crossing a marital love he has just witnessed first-hand with rape—a cross-coupling indeed. And in pursuing his resolution from this point forward in a more or less robotic fashion, he comes to resemble an action figure in the modern, movie sense.
27. Coppelia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 29.
28. Puttenham, p. 99.
29. Puttenham, p. 446.
30. It is worth noting that Augustine, too, has more than a casual interest in this story, that for him it opens a further perspective into the foundational principles of civilization, as he considers the virtues needed for the City of God and considers, too, what was good—and might still be good—in the City of Rome. He, like Puttenham and Kahn, is deeply interested in figuring out how “to call the people together by admiration to a plausible and virtuous conversation.” (Puttenham, p. 99).
31. Kahn, pp. 36–7.
32. The question of passivity or resistance on Lucrece’s part at the actual moment of the rape is complicated. Tarquin clearly uses force throughout, and she equally clearly continues to protest, at least verbally, so that he stifles her cries “with the nightly linen that she wears” (l. 680). But Lucrece later reproaches herself for not having offered a more vigorously physical resistance (ll. 1034–36). Augustine says in his commentary on the crucial issue of consent that “only she herself could know” (29), but while this in one sense is true, it may still mislead—even she may not know fully or clearly what constitutes consent. Augustine does not consider the possibility that consent itself may admit of degrees, may (for instance) manifest itself in a shadowy or partially obscure form, a feeling of not having resisted strongly enough. In addition, Augustine also thinks that if she had consented to the act, it would be because “she was so enticed by her own desire” (30). Again, this oversimplifies, and it forecloses on a possibility that Shakespeare manages to open up: though his Lucrece is clearly not enticed by a desire for the act, she may nevertheless be enticed by a love of her husband and a desire to protect his honour. In the circumstances, this desire serves to modify resistance and to introduce a kind of passivity that might look like consent but is really resistance under another banner.
33. Burrow, p. 315n.

34. S. Clark Hulse, "'A Piece of Skilful Painting' in Shakespeare's 'Lucrece,'" *Shakespeare Survey* 31 (1978), pp. 13–32, observes that the Sinon episode is presented out of chronological order so as to make it the rhetorical climax of the *ekphrasis* (19).
35. Weaver treats the Troy scene as employing "the popular rhetorical exercise of *ethopoeia*, in which a student impersonated a legendary character for the sake of matching style to character, or borrowing that person's misfortune for the sake of feeling emotion" (442). Thus Lucrece channels her grief through identifying with Hecuba (443) and her anger through identifying with Priam (444). Similarly, Richard Meek, "*Ekphrasis in The Rape of Lucrece and The Winter's Tale*," *Studies in English Literature* 46 (2006), pp. 389–414, emphasizes Lucrece's "emotional identification" (392) with the figures in the picture, as does Claire Preston in "*Ekphrasis*" in *Renaissance Figures of Speech*, ed. Sylvia Adamson, Gavin Alexander, and Katrin Ettenhuber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 126.
36. Like a number of other commentators on the painting, Hulse thinks that the identification of Lucrece and Hecuba in sorrow is the centrepiece. He concludes that "It is in looking at the painting, in examining by comparison the woes of Hecuba, that Lucrece is finally able to face the full diabolism of Tarquin and her own lack of responsibility for what has occurred" (20). It is my view that her identification with Priam is every bit as important as her identification with Hecuba and that, in aligning herself with him, she is not merely sharing his emotion but accepting some measure of responsibility for what has occurred. She sees herself as not only a sufferer but an actor in her own story, and her actions are not altogether restricted by her gender. Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), addresses the question of narrative authorship rather than of drama, but she makes a related point: "While the poem's story of rape may produce in us a sense of certainty that we know what we mean by the words 'man' and 'woman'—or what we mean when we say a 'male' or 'female' desire, a 'male' or 'female' voice—its figural language of imitation and ventriloquism continue to disturb that seemingly self-evident knowledge" (197).
37. As Simone says, "Shakespeare's use of Troy is severed from history" and it infuses the story with a sense of "timelessness" (72).
38. Even a critic as interested in the political dimension of the poem as Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), concedes that "There is little need for Brutus in Shakespeare's version because Lucrece has already done all the work for the reader" (140). Hadfield argues that Lucrece's political ideas are active and dynamic, "changing as we read" (142). Simone makes similar points: "as astute and strong as Brutus shows himself, he has virtually no contact with Lucrece or the central experience and debates of the poem" (85).
39. Puttenham emphasizes that one of the main uses of the Figure of Silence is for the expression of "shame" (250).
40. *The New Cambridge Shakespeare: The Poems*, ed. John Roe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 33.

41. Puttenham, p. 296.
42. Weaver points out that "quality" has a technical meaning in forensic debate, involving exculpatory arguments based on "mitigating circumstances" (428).
43. In Livy, Lucrece makes the affirmation herself: "it is my bodye only that is violated, my minde God knoweth is guiltles" (quoted in Prince, p. 194, from William Painter's translation of Livy's *History*); in Ovid, "Her husband and her sire pardoned the deed enforced," without her having either raised the question or made the affirmation (quoted in Prince, p. 201, from J.G. Frazer's translation of Ovid's *Fasti*).
44. Hoskins, p. 36.
45. It is interesting to note that the critics who argue that *syneciosis* is the most significant, indeed the controlling, figure of the poem generally overlook the "joyless smile" as an example of the figure, even though it appears at the climax of the action. This omission may be owing to a tendency, particularly in the work of Fineman and Belsey, to treat the figure primarily in terms of contradiction or opposition. Belsey calls it "the trope of deconstruction" (332), but though it certainly may operate in this way, it may also serve a constructive purpose, aiming at something "better" as Hoskins says. Puttenham also insists on its constructive function: "it takes me two contrary words and tieth them as it were in a pair of couples, and so makes them agree like good fellows" (291). Sister Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* (New York and London, Haffner, 1947) says that "In contrast to syneciosis, which is a composition of contrary terms, antithesis is an opposition of them" (324).
46. Belsey, in the course of arguing that "Lucrece does the best she can" (333), offers a perceptive account of the pressure of the Cartesian dualism in the critical tradition (331).
47. Of the many pictorial representations of Lucrece in the instant before her suicide, the one that comes closest (though not of course identical) in spirit to Shakespeare's "body thinking" is the great painting by Rembrandt in the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC. Arthur K. Wheelock, Jr., *Dutch Paintings of the Seventeenth Century* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1995), offers the following assessment: "Rembrandt ... fused here the pagan and Christian worlds to create an exceptionally profound image of the psychological moment just prior to Lucretia's fatal decision to thrust the knife into her heart. With her arms raised in a gesture that echoes Christ on the cross, she looks down toward the weapon of her destruction with the expression of one who in her decision to commit suicide must weigh issues never described by Livy" (284). Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) makes similar claims for the two paintings of Lucrece by Artemisia, whom she groups with Rembrandt and Shakespeare on this subject (239).
48. Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 49 and 44.
49. Donaldson, p. 46.
50. Donaldson, p. 48.

51. Donaldson, p. 47.
52. The matters she raises would all seem to be crucial for any civilized dealing with the problem of rape: appropriate punishment of the criminal by the state (even if the state must be reconstituted in order to effect this); for the victim, a verdict of innocent in the eyes of men; and among women a reputation of unimpeachable honour and integrity. That *Lucrece* herself may not fully succeed in coordinating these criteria does not invalidate their claims on our attention. And while she may seem to say little directly about reconstituting the state, Andrew Hadfield makes a persuasive argument for regarding her as voicing an incipient republicanism which prepares the way for the poem's denouement (see especially pages 140–47). See also Annabel Patterson, *Reading Between the Lines* (London: Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2003), pp. 297–317, and Michael Platt, *Rome and Romans According to Shakespeare* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983): “The revolution of *Lucrece*’s intention from her violation to her suicide is important to note, for it parallels a revolution from passive suffering under a tyrant ... to active revenge and alteration of the regime” (29).
53. For a wide-ranging exploration of the crucial importance of “jurisdiction” (in literature as well as life) see Bradin Cormack, *The Power to Do Justice: Jurisdiction, English Literature, and the Rise of Common Law* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Jane O. Newman, “‘And Let Mild Women to Him Lose Their Mildness’: Philomela, Female Violence, and Shakespeare’s *The Rape of Lucrece*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45 (1994), pp. 304–26, argues that the allusions to the rape of Philomela in Shakespeare’s poem summon echoes of the violent revenge that she, with help from her sister Procne, takes against her rapist, Tereus, discovering in the process an “option” of political agency for women. Newman concludes that “The repression of the full story of Philomela” by Shakespeare and his critics deprives readers of “any alternative” to the “doubled” violence of rape and suicide presented in *Lucrece* (326). But if there are alternatives, the subtle questions of jurisdiction that Shakespeare raises would seem to be more promising leads than the revenge exacted in the earlier narrative, which has its own problems with doubled violence, including violence against an innocent child. The killing of Itys, the nephew of Philomela and son of Procne, and then feeding parts of his body to Tereus results, at best, in what Sir Francis Bacon would call “a kind of wild justice.”
54. Donaldson, p. 44.
55. *Shakespeare’s Poems: Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece and the Shorter Poems*, The Arden Shakespeare, 3rd Series, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen (London: Thomson Learning, 2007), p. 54.
56. Walley argues that “In effect, the poem affords a unique entry into the workshop of Shakespeare’s dramatic development,” establishing what he calls “the matrix of the later great tragedies” (482).