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Historical-Poetic Transformations of the  
Legend of Lucretia and Benjamin Britten's  
*The Rape of Lucretia*

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The University of Huddersfield

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of Masters by Research in Music

29.10.2018



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## Abstract

The legend of Lucretia is a story that appears in literature, poetry and artwork dating from approximately 500 BC, and more recently musically, in Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946). In my thesis I aim to explore the transformative power of mythology and legend, as a reflection of historical and religious attitudes towards gender and rape, in the case of Lucretia. I will compare the historical-poetic accounts of *Lucretia* according to Livy, Ovid, St Augustine, Chaucer and Shakespeare, and then alongside Duncan's preparation of and Britten's setting of the libretto. This will encourage a discourse concerning developing attitudes towards the nature and faith of the raped Lucretia, whilst also exploring Britten's musical construction of such features for a reduced orchestral force.

Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* remains one of the composer's lesser-known and infrequently performed operas. Critics and scholars, who have focused on issues of faith, gender and rape, in the score and libretto, have attributed this unpopularity to the opera's combination of pagan and Christian faiths. Whilst the opera concerns the pagan-Roman Lucretia, Britten and librettist Ronald Duncan adopt a Christian framework, by which the pagan narrative and moral message is destabilised.

In scholarship on Britten's opera, critics such as Patricia Howard, Claire Seymour and Philip Brett have concluded that the blend of pagan and Christian faiths through harmony and orchestration results in an incohesive faith-narrative: where Lucretia is praised by pagans for her virtue, she is deplored by Christians for her supposed guilt. I intend to explore Britten's narrative through a historical-poetic approach. As such, my source texts epitomise attitudes towards the raped Lucretia from pagan, Christian, and political viewpoints. This will lead to a detailed musical analysis of key sections, exploring musical constructions of gender, faith and rape.

In the legend, Lucretia's Otherness, created by her proclaimed chastity, is the object that Tarquinius wishes to defeat. However, beyond this narrative, the legend of Lucretia was adapted, manipulated, and subverted throughout history, often to serve a religious or political purpose beyond the narrative itself. I demonstrate that a historical-poetic understanding of the legend may provide depth to the discourse surrounding Britten and Duncan's intentions within and beyond the opera's narrative. This understanding will be used to examine external factors that inform the compositional and textual process of *Lucretia* as a metaphor, where an examination of only the score and libretto may not suffice.



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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Britten, *The Rape of Lucretia* (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1946). References throughout the List of Figures are to this edition, with relevant page numbers provided in the captions.

<sup>2</sup> Franz Schubert, "Op. 2 Gretchen am Spinnrade", in *Franz Schubert Lieder* (London: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1814), pp. 14–23.

recording of *The Rape of Lucretia*,<sup>3</sup> and the English National Opera's DVD of their production of the opera.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Aldeburgh Festival Ensemble, *The Rape of Lucretia* (Aldeburgh: EMI Records Ltd., 2013). CD 6026722.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Britten and Fiona Shaw, *Britten: The Rape of Lucretia DVD (English National Opera)* (London: Opus Arte, 2016).

# 1. Introduction

Benjamin Britten composed the opera *The Rape of Lucretia* (first performed at Glyndebourne, July 1946) with librettist Ronald Duncan after Eric Crozier allegedly saw a production of André Obey's play *Le Viol de Lucretia* (1931) and suggested it to the pair. Whilst Duncan was the librettist and Crozier the producer, Britten also collaborated with set designer John Piper and conductors Ernest Ansermet and Reginald Goodall. Many of Britten's close friends made up the cast, including Kathleen Ferrier and Nancy Evans as Lucretia, Joan Cross as the Female Chorus, and the composer's partner Peter Pears as the Male Chorus.<sup>5</sup> *Lucretia* was Britten's first chamber opera – a dramatic and daring departure from the grand scale of his former, highly successful *Peter Grimes* (1945) – and was written for only twelve instrumentalists and eight singers (four male and four female). The orchestral forces include a standard wind quintet of flute (piccolo and alto flute), oboe (cor anglais), clarinet (bass clarinet), bassoon and horn, a string quintet of two violins, viola, 'cello and double bass, and finally harp and percussion. In addition, the conductor plays piano in recitative sections.<sup>6</sup>

The plot of Britten's *Lucretia* is based fundamentally on the Roman legend (circa. 500 BC), which tells the story of the chaste Lucretia, raped by Prince Sextus Tarquinius, son of King Tarquinius Superbus. Soon after her rape, she commits suicide, and the vengeance of her family leads to an uprising, the overthrow of the Etruscan monarchy, and the founding of the Roman republican system that lasted for hundreds of years.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Britten and Duncan frame the pagan narrative with a Christian framework, from the perspective of the Male and Female Choruses.

In exploring the rape of Lucretia in accordance with Titus Livius's account, Langlands identifies key themes within the legend of Lucretia. Lucretia's *pudicitia* (purity, chastity) is of immense importance to her, to such a degree that she identifies publicly as a chaste woman; as such she protects her chastity not only to uphold her own reputation, but the reputation of her husband and family. Stuprum (an illegal sexual act, including rape and adultery) is the act that defiles Lucretia's

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<sup>5</sup> Britten, *Lucretia* [pp. I–VI].

<sup>6</sup> Britten, *Lucretia* [p. V].

<sup>7</sup> Rebecca Langlands, *Sexual Morality in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 80.

purity. In Livy's account (and most others), the theme of stuprum is used to create a predicament for Lucretia, in which she can either submit to rape by Tarquinius, or be framed for adultery with a slave after being killed by him. This implied adultery would tarnish her family, husband, and her own pudor (honour, shame), so she is forced to choose between submitting to Tarquinius' sexual/power-driven desire, or her family, husband's, and own public ridicule after her death. After submitting to Tarquinius, Lucretia demands vengeance from her husband and family before asserting that no adulterous woman should use her name as an excuse to live, and stabs herself in the heart.<sup>8</sup> Typically, in most accounts, this is followed by Junius Brutus' overthrow of the Etruscan monarchy; however Britten does not explore this in detail – Junius is given little focus within the opera.<sup>9</sup>

Tarquinius pressures Lucretia to submit to sex per vim, a phrase that literally translates with force, but implies not only physical force but psychological force; in this case, a verbal force by means of threat. In most accounts of the Lucretia legend, whilst Tarquinius threatens Lucretia with physical violence and death, it is a threat to her honour (through the framing of adultery) that pressures Lucretia into submitting to Tarquinius.<sup>10</sup> In my thesis, I will therefore be discussing a story in which a man threatens a woman successfully – per vim – with psychological, rather than physical force into submitting to sex. I will be exploring the numerous ways in which different poets from different historical and religious backgrounds utilise Tarquinius' use of, and Lucretia's response to psychological force, often to transform the legend of Lucretia through various means, and create binarisms between non-complicity vs. complicity, and Roman vs. Christian faith. These transformations establish Lucretia's status as (or not as) an exemplum of virtue, which subsequently encourages (or indeed discourages) the behaviours and attitudes of the poets' contemporary reader.

Britten's account of *Lucretia* involves the chaste, Roman Lucretia, who is raped by Tarquinius and ultimately commits suicide; the three male characters, who depict different facets of male sexuality, honour, and jealousy, and two other female characters that represent Lucretia's virtue and passion; and also the Male and

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<sup>8</sup> Langlands, pp. 81–82.

<sup>9</sup> Ronald Duncan, "The Libretto", in *The Rape of Lucretia: A Symposium* (London: Bodley Head, 1948), pp. 10-54 (p. 52).

<sup>10</sup> Langlands, pp. 89–90.

Female Chorus, who describe not only the events on stage but also events of Roman history and the death of Christ.<sup>11</sup> Narratively, *Lucretia* is a complex opera, and as such, much criticism is entirely justified in highlighting its density. However, I propose that Britten's condemned uses of Christianity, implied-complicity, and (possibly deliberate) ambiguity in conclusion are at least justified by their existence in previous literature. Thus, my thesis will aim to look beyond the opera's alleged density and pretentiousness, to gain an understanding of the past literary traditions that may have directly or indirectly informed it. This is an area which many musicologists familiar with this opera have not addressed, for the purpose of their research. I am not aiming to justify Britten's Christianisation of the pagan legend, or excuse his possible implications of Lucretia's complicity. However, these traditions of Christianisation, complicity and ambiguity in conclusion lend to Britten's construction of men, women, and rape within the opera. An understanding of historical poems regarding the legend of Lucretia – steeped in historically situated traditions – is required if we are to understand the historicity of Britten's account with regards to not only men, women, and rape, but the bigger metaphorical picture *Lucretia* comes to represent.

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<sup>11</sup> Eric Crozier, 'Benjamin Britten's Second Opera "The Rape of Lucretia"', *Tempo*, 1946, 11–12 (pp. 11–12).

## 2. Literature Review

### Initial Reviews of the Opera

Following the premiere of Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, critics condemned certain aspects of the opera which are arguably vital to its musical characterisations of gender, rape, and faith. At the close of Ronald Duncan's *Working with Britten*, examples of reviews are given that sum up attitudes towards the opera which critique Britten's musical style, but primarily regard his inclusion of a Christian narrative.<sup>12</sup> A critic for *The Weekly Review* and Ernest Newman of *The Sunday Times* both critique Britten's compositional style for relying too heavily on recitative singing and less so on 'actual music', and Preston Benson of *The Star* condemns Britten's choice of layering different sentences in different voices at once, rendering the language impossible to hear. Meanwhile, Beverly Baxter of the *Evening Standard* argues that the craft and wit of Duncan's libretto is often lost under Britten's music, whilst W.J. Turner of *The Spectator* argues that Duncan's libretto was fleshed out with music that is 'quite ordinary'.<sup>13</sup> The feature most frequently deplored by critics is Britten's use of a Christian narrative that is incongruous with the Roman-pagan legend, the inclusion of which does not seem entirely justified by either Benjamin Britten or librettist Ronald Duncan.<sup>14</sup> As discussed by Mitchell, Reed and Cooke, Britten's letters confirm that it was he who requested that Duncan draft an Epilogue for the opera, to offer a Christian interpretation of Lucretia's tragedy.<sup>15</sup>

Ronald Duncan introduces the criticisms of Christian narrative with a short paragraph noting his own disapproval of the epilogue. Disappointed in Britten for allowing blame to be attached to him, he asserted that he believed the opera to be complete at Lucretia's suicide.<sup>16</sup> He then turns to more reviews.<sup>17</sup> Cecil Gray of *The Observer* argues that whilst the work is powerful, the Christian narrative imposed by the Male and Female Choruses does not fit with the brutal story of Rome, and

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<sup>12</sup> Ronald Duncan, *Working with Britten: A Personal Memoir* (Welcombe: Rebel Press, 1981).

<sup>13</sup> Duncan, pp. 164, 166–67.

<sup>14</sup> Crozier, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Letters from a Life: Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten*, ed. by Donald Mitchell, Philip Reed, and Mervyn Cooke, VI vols (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), III, p. 179.

<sup>16</sup> Duncan, p. 168.

<sup>17</sup> Duncan, p. 168.

anonymous critics both for the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* argue that the epilogue is ultimately anticlimactic within the pagan setting. A critic for *Time and Tide* blames the Christian moral framework for the failure of the Male and Female Chorus' lack of intensity and involvement in the drama, and alludes to the characters' connection to André Obey's play *Le Viol de Lucretia*, which I will come back to later.<sup>18</sup>

Here I identify two contrasting and separate arguments against the Christian narrative: firstly, whether it makes plausible sense, and secondly, whether any audience will understand it. Firstly, Christian Darton of *Opera* argues that the symbolism of Lucretia as Christ crucified and the theme of virtue defiled by man's nature, are idiosyncratic regarding the pagan-Roman legend.<sup>19</sup> However, the story of St Augustine of Hippo presents a Lucretia whose Christian virtue is defiled by her own sin (after Augustine implies that Lucretia was complicit in her own rape, it is then implied that she committed either adultery or unjust self-murder, after being raped by Tarquinius).<sup>20</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer's 'Lucretia' (in *The City of God*) and William Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* both present a Christian framework in which Lucretia's fate is sealed by a man before the rape even occurs (this is described in more depth in Table 1 on page 51).<sup>21</sup> An understanding of these past historical poems reveals that Britten and Duncan's Christian narrative (in which both of these themes arise) is not so idiosyncratic.

As for the second argument, many critics agree that the Christian framework of the Male and Female Chorus complicates the opera unnecessarily, too much so for the average opera-goer to understand, and this may be true. Whilst Ernest Newman of the *Sunday Times* acknowledges the previous literature of Chaucer and Shakespeare, and argues that the legend of Lucretia is bountiful for poets, he argues that the legend is not an appropriate topic for music, and that the Christian narrative

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<sup>18</sup> Duncan, pp. 168–69.

<sup>19</sup> Duncan, pp. 169–70.

<sup>20</sup> Leah Schwebel, "Livy and Augustine as Negative Models in the Legend of Lucrece", *The Chaucer Review*, 52.1 (2017), 29–45 (p. 31).

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Legend of Lucrece", in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry Dean Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Poems*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones and H. R. Woudhuysen (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2007).



is too poorly executed.<sup>22</sup> W.J. Turner of *The Spectator* argues that Duncan's libretto is too pretentious and dense for audiences to understand, and provides Beethoven's *Fidelio* (1814) as an example of an operatic success despite a poor libretto.<sup>23</sup>

Desmond Shawe-Taylor of *New Statesman and Nation* offers the only compromise, arguing that if Britten's opera had reached its musical completion at the death of Lucretia, no epilogue of any nature (Christian, pagan, or otherwise) would have been required.<sup>24</sup> As I discussed in the introduction, the plot of the opera involves not only the rape and suicide of the Roman Lucretia in relation to the reputation of her male peers, but also the Christian framing of the Male and Female Chorus, who throughout the opera describe the events on stage, events of Roman history and the death of Christ.<sup>25</sup> It is perfectly plausible to accept that opera-goers may find the density of the opera challenging and overwhelming to understand; however, to discredit the libretto entirely and invalidate the significance of the Christian narrative altogether demonstrates an ignorance of past literature. The problem here is of execution, not validity or pretention, no matter how difficult the opera is to comprehend.

## Scholarship

The reviews cited by Duncan appear to have set the tone for future scholarship regarding *Lucretia*. Many scholars approach the opera through musical means, that is, they assess the opera by analysing the music (composition, orchestration, motivic coding, etc.) separately from its literary roots, and often bring in other themes as subtopics (sexuality, religion, etc.). Norman Del Mar discusses Britten's drastic change in scale, from the large-scale orchestral forces of *Peter Grimes* to the comparatively pared-back, economic use of only twelve instrumentalists in *The Rape of Lucretia*.<sup>26</sup> Patricia Howard largely describes *Lucretia* in terms of its plot and the use of orchestral colours and individual instruments to evoke characters and

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<sup>22</sup> Duncan, pp. 167–68.

<sup>23</sup> Duncan, p. 165.

<sup>24</sup> Duncan, p. 169.

<sup>25</sup> Crozier, pp. 11–12.

<sup>26</sup> Norman Del Mar, "I. The Rape of Lucretia", in *Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on His Works from a Group of Specialists* (London: Rockliff, 1952), pp. 132–33.

moods.<sup>27</sup> Her attention often turns to thematic material of scenes such as Tarquinius' ride to Rome, describing in detail the relentless power of Tarquinius, depicted as a horse, and Lucretia as the overwhelming River Tiber in which Tarquinius is engulfed.<sup>28</sup> Like many of the aforementioned critics, she briefly disputes the authenticity of a Christian narrative within a pagan setting.<sup>29</sup> Peter Evans also writes mostly of composition and orchestration, also exploring Tarquinius' ride to Rome in detail, but in addition, discusses the orchestral colours of Lucretia's sleep scene.<sup>30</sup> Here he alludes to the dichotomy of male vs. female function and material within the opera, primarily with regards to the motivic material in which the males are characterised by stepwise scales, and females by minor thirds.<sup>31</sup> Christopher Headington's discussion of *Lucretia* is similar to Del Mar's, as he compares Britten's transition from large to small-scale opera, to Handel's move from operas to *Messiah* and Stravinsky's composition of *The Soldier's Tale* after several ballet compositions.<sup>32</sup> Headington is the first scholar to discuss the implication that Lucretia may be complicit in her own rape, within Britten's opera.<sup>33</sup>

Arnold Whittall discusses *Lucretia* as Britten's first chamber opera, and notes that whilst it is inspired by André Obey's play, Britten's inclusion of a Christian narrative is a new addition. Regarded as unconventional – following the success of the large-scale *Peter Grimes* – Britten imbeds the chamber opera with his favoured theme of conflict between the vulnerable and the vicious.<sup>34</sup> Whittall's contribution largely discusses Britten's variety of musical styles, more so than other scholars, and argues that much of the opera follows musical convention in its use of funeral marches and lullabies. One example of such is the distinctive contrast between nocturne and drinking song in "Who reaches heaven first is the best philosopher". He further argues that "Maria was unmasked at a masked ball" distinguishes the

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<sup>27</sup> Patricia Howard, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: An Introduction* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1969), pp. 29–45.

<sup>28</sup> Howard, pp. 34–35.

<sup>29</sup> Howard, p. 42.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten* (London: Dent, 1979), p. 126.

<sup>31</sup> Evans, p. 132.

<sup>32</sup> Christopher Headington, "The Rape of Lucretia", in *The Britten Companion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 120–126 (p. 120).

<sup>33</sup> Headington, p. 123.

<sup>34</sup> Arnold Whittall, "The Chamber Operas", in *The Cambridge Companion to Benjamin Britten*, ed. by Mervyn Cooke, Cambridge Companions to Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 95–112 (p. 96).

relationship and conflict between the male participants; Tarquinius as lecherous, Junius as jealous, and Collatinus as innocently naïve and content. In gendered terms, Whittall describes Tarquinius' ride to Rome as 'pure libido music', and asserts that "Their spinning wheel unwinds", sung by the three female characters, is a direct contrast to the drinking song of "Who reaches heaven first is the best philosopher", sung by the three men.<sup>35</sup>

Claire Seymour's chapter on *Lucretia* is more fully informed by questions of gender. Agreeing with Whittall, Seymour notes Britten's continuation of the theme of oppressed outsider from *Peter Grimes*. Seymour elaborates further, that whilst Grimes is the neglected result of a corrupt society, Lucretia is the fully integrated ideal of a corrupt patriarchy, and as such she is the embodied opposite of Grimes.<sup>36</sup> Seymour argues that within the opera, Lucretia's oppression is asserted through the process of 'naming' in which each repetition of her assigned motif (typically sung by the men) is inlaid with chastity and purity.<sup>37</sup> Lucretia's virtue is not the only oppressive quality imposed by men. An extension of Lucretia's chastity, Seymour raises Britten's original drafts in which Lucretia's maid Lucia is considerably more flirtatious than in the final revision, referring to Howard's argument that Lucia represents the passion of Lucretia without virtue. We are led to this conclusion by comparing Lucia against her counterpart Bianca, who implores virtue but displays no sexual passion.<sup>38</sup> Seymour discusses the Christian framing of the opera and cites *Obey* as a key inspiration, accepting in a footnote that whilst the Christian framing is not present in *Obey*'s play, Shakespeare's *Lucrece* employs a Christian framing (albeit not so vital to its plot).<sup>39</sup> Continuing the theme of Christianity, Seymour reminds us of Augustine's account of Lucretia, in which the pagan origins of the legend are subverted to condemn Lucretia's suicide,<sup>40</sup> and in which Augustine begs

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<sup>35</sup> Whittall, pp. 97–99.

<sup>36</sup> Claire Seymour, *The Operas of Benjamin Britten: Expression and Evasion* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), pp. 77–78.

<sup>37</sup> Seymour, p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> Howard, p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> Seymour, p. 87.

<sup>40</sup> Seymour, p. 96.

the question: “If she is adulterous, why is she praised? If chaste, why was she put to death?”<sup>41</sup>

Philip Brett explores the opera’s orchestration, scale, and motivic writing previously explored by Howard, Evans and Whittall, and in addition, identifies the opening punctuated chords as containing the key tonal areas of the opera.<sup>42</sup> Identifying the difficult topic of rape as the opera’s critical downfall, Brett argues similarly to Whittall and Seymour, that Britten – as a homosexual pacifist, and therefore an outsider within his society – identifies with Lucretia (who is implied to be an outsider due to her chastity).<sup>43</sup> Crediting Obey as an inspiration and source for the opera’s libretto, Brett explores Britten’s introduction of a Christian framing with regards to Ian Donaldson’s theory of ‘magical thinking’; the concept inferred by Christianity, that death acts as a religious sacrifice which rectifies and absolves the crime.<sup>44</sup> Brett does not enjoy the Christian narrative, however, and argues that not only is the metaphor forced, but the opera could have functioned perfectly well without it.<sup>45</sup>

J.P.E. Harper-Scott has published two essays which largely discuss the oppression of Lucretia and its musical construction through motivic coding. In the first of these publications, “Britten’s opera about rape”, Harper-Scott asserts from the outset that most of his discussion follows musical analysis, and he later discusses the relationship between musical coding and key themes of the legend as told by Shakespeare.<sup>46</sup> His is the first publication to make explicit comparisons between the legend of Lucretia and contemporary theories concerning attitudes towards raped women. Referring to a Danish production of the opera – renamed *Lucretia*, in which the removed rape scene was replaced by a passionate love scene – Harper-Scott speaks with derision of the production’s subsequent press conference, in which his fellow participants attempted to downplay the significance of Tarquinius’s assault of

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<sup>41</sup> Seymour, p. 75.

<sup>42</sup> Philip Brett, *Music and Sexuality in Britten: Selected Essays*, ed. by George E Haggerty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), pp. 56–57.

<sup>43</sup> Brett, pp. 57–61.

<sup>44</sup> Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and Its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 25.

<sup>45</sup> Brett, pp. 63–66.

<sup>46</sup> J.P.E. Harper-Scott, “Britten’s Opera about Rape”, *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 21.1 (2010), 65–88 (p. 65).

Lucretia.<sup>47</sup> Harper-Scott's essay not only discusses the oppression of the patriarchy within the narrative of *Lucretia*, but the oppressive way in which Britten handles female characters in his other operas, where roles are scarce and often insignificant, and characters are not given any sense of individual personality.<sup>48</sup> Harper-Scott aims to investigate the often side-lined Lucretia, but concludes that Britten too side-lines Lucretia in his provision of a Christian redemption.<sup>49</sup>

In his later essay, "Post-war women in Britten", Harper-Scott argues the lack of individuality given to women in Britten's opera is idiosyncratic within the post Second-World-War era of Great Britain, in which women desired greater empowerment and independence from their husbands through work. Harper-Scott argues contrary to this notion, selecting *Peter Grimes*' Ellen as a character whose sole purpose is to support Grimes, and arguing that Lucretia's suicide after her rape ultimately upholds the patriarchy that oppressed her, named her chastity, and caused her rape in the first place. In addition, in *Albert Herring* (1948), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1960) and *Death in Venice* (1973), the women only perform in ensemble sections, and *Billy Budd* (1951) features an entirely male cast.<sup>50</sup>

Utilising the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan, Harper-Scott describes the way in which Lucretia's *objet a* (an 'object' that generates desire which is ultimately un-satisfiable by its generation of desire for more) – her chastity – becomes marked compositionally through the use of a B natural.<sup>51</sup> The B natural is simultaneously a leading note to the C of the 'pure' key of C major, and the dominant of E major, and acts as the stain on her nature that men (specifically Tarquinius) desire to 'resolve' through musico-sexual defeat. The cruelty of Tarquinius' desire is laid bare by Harper-Scott, who argues that the crux of Lacan's theory lies in unquenchable satisfaction – one can never be truly satisfied, as satisfaction itself only leads to yet more desire for more – thus Lucretia's suicide ultimately upholds the patriarchy which created such tyrannical and unquenchable desire possessed by Tarquinius in the first place. Musical resolution is in fact withheld until the close of the

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<sup>47</sup> Harper-Scott, "Opera about Rape", pp. 65–66.

<sup>48</sup> Harper-Scott, "Opera about Rape", pp. 77–78.

<sup>49</sup> Harper-Scott, "Opera about Rape", p. 88.

<sup>50</sup> J.P.E. Harper-Scott, "Post-War Women in Britten", in *Rethinking Britten*, ed. by Philip Rupprecht (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 86–101 (pp. 86–87).

<sup>51</sup> Harper-Scott, "Post-War Women", p. 89.

opera, and only found in the parallel of the Christian framing as Lucretia is compared to Christ, when the initial C minor of the opening is finally resolved to C major.<sup>52</sup>

The topics that scholars have considered are wide-ranging and include not only forms of musical analysis such as orchestration, motivic coding and style, but also the subtopics of gender, sexuality, religion and psychoanalytic theory. Whilst these contributions are invaluable and have been vital to my research, scholarship often lacks an understanding of the historical poems regarding the legend of Lucretia. This is not to say that scholars deliberately avoid past literature, as it may not have been directly relevant to their research questions; however, a greater understanding of the historical legend can inform one's interpretation of Britten and Duncan's musical and literary choices. I purposefully have not definitively resolved any of the issues posed by the previous scholarship or reviews so far, as this will make up the body of my discussion to come.

### Source Texts

When deciding upon the source texts to critique for my thesis, I identified two challenging issues that potentially render much of the past scholarship regarding *Lucretia* problematic at best, and at worst, foundationally false. These are, firstly, the citation of Obey's text of *Le Viol de Lucretia* as the model for Duncan's libretto, and secondly, the context of last-minute revisions of Duncan's libretto.

Howard, Evans and Whittall all credit the origins of Duncan's libretto to the French play, but as Duncan argues, Britten and himself were obliged to include Obey as a citation after the playwright's legal team threatened to file an injunction against the composer and librettist, which would have prevented the opera's premiere and potentially any future productions. Furthermore, Duncan claims that Britten himself denied any evidence of plagiarism, attesting that no reader would see any similarities between Obey and Duncan's texts.<sup>53</sup> Duncan's claims are confirmed when cross-referenced against Britten's letters, in which Britten encouraged Duncan to allow the premiere to go ahead without hitch; many members of the cast were participating in the opera entirely based on their own goodwill, and would likely drop out if the

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<sup>52</sup> Harper-Scott, "Post-War Women", p. 89.

<sup>53</sup> Duncan, pp. 81–82.

performance was postponed.<sup>54</sup> Seymour<sup>55</sup> and Harper-Scott<sup>56</sup> both allude to the same legal battle in footnotes, but continue the body of their discussions on the pretence that Obey did indeed provide the model for Duncan's text; despite suggesting the legend to Britten personally after seeing the French play, even Crozier omits the citation of Obey in his essay on production.<sup>57</sup> I therefore propose that Britten and Duncan did not draw upon Obey's play as a source text for the opera's libretto, but despite this, the subsequent criticism Britten and Duncan received for their inclusion of a Christian narrative (where Obey does not) frequently focused on the potentially false-comparison between Obey and Britten's productions. If these critics and scholars had no preconception of Obey's influence, their reviews and critical responses may not have so harshly critiqued the Christian narrative.

Secondly, Paul Kildea discusses in detail the last-minute revisions made to Duncan's libretto after the Lord Chamberlain's reader of plays, H.C. Game, found specific lines of the text uncomfortable, insofar as Lucretia was implied to be complicit in her own rape.<sup>58</sup> This distinction even divided the cast, with Nancy Evans (who portrayed Lucretia in some performances) arguing that the notion of Lucretia's complicity destroyed the essence of the opera. Janet Baker was led to question the depiction of Lucretia's post-rape guilt, on the basis that Lucretia should not feel guilty for a crime she did not commit.<sup>59</sup> Peter Evans describes the way in which specific harmonic and tonal areas represent imply Lucretia's lust and desire for Tarquinius,<sup>60</sup> a concept with which Brett later concurs.<sup>61</sup> Many scholars critique lines that imply Lucretia's potential complicity that are still present in the opera, and when these are assessed with regards to the removed lines and the Christian framework, Britten's *Lucretia* bears more resemblance to the Christian-framed Lucretia of Augustine (written in the early fifth-century). Whilst Britten does not cite Augustine as an influence, his use of a Christian framework and implications of complicity and blame follow in the tradition of not only Augustine, but of Chaucer and Shakespeare, a

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<sup>54</sup> Mitchell, Reed, and Cooke, III, p. 194.

<sup>55</sup> Seymour, p. 77.

<sup>56</sup> Harper-Scott, "Opera about Rape", p. 65.

<sup>57</sup> Crozier, pp. 11–12.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Kildea, *Benjamin Britten: A Life in the Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin, 2013), pp. 268–73.

<sup>59</sup> Kildea, pp. 271–73.

<sup>60</sup> Evans, p. 140.

<sup>61</sup> Brett, p. 67.

literary tradition that frequently subverts the virtue of the Roman Lucretia to create a destabilised opposition in which Lucretia is not praiseworthy.

Britten was known for his highly effective orchestrations, and despite criticisms of his Christian framework, many critics praised his uniquely expressive and versatile use of only twelve instrumentalists and eight singers. As I will discuss in the first half of section 3, Britten's use of animalistic and naturalistic imagery follows in the tradition of Publius Ovidius Naso's *Metamorphoses*.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, in this section I will explore conventions and constructions of masculinity, femininity, and rape in the works of Livy and Ovid, with reference to their accounts of *Lucretia*. As a response to criticism and scholarship that condemns Britten's use of Christianity, complicity, and (possibly deliberate) ambiguity in the opera's conclusion, I will explore Augustine, Chaucer, and Shakespeare's accounts of *Lucretia* – in which these themes are exploited – in the second half of section 3. Harper-Scott claims that Britten and Duncan utilised Livy, Shakespeare and Obey's texts as key inspirations behind the opera.<sup>63</sup> However, I have chosen not to explore Obey's *Le Viol de Lucretia* in my thesis because I propose that he was falsely credited; instead, I will use more directly relevant literary sources to achieve a fruitful understanding of Britten and Duncan's inclusion of narratives of Christianity and implied-complicity.

In the main body of my thesis, I will examine Livy's *The Early History of Rome*,<sup>64</sup> and Ovid's *Fasti*<sup>65</sup> and *Metamorphosis*,<sup>66</sup> with regards to the construction of gender, rape and animalistic and naturalistic imagery. I will also supplement my discussion of these stories with scholarship concerning historical poetry and mythology, including work by Alcuin Blamires, Leo Curran and Tom Stevenson. When discussing the historical poems of Lucretia by St Augustine (in *The City of God*)<sup>67</sup> and Chaucer (in *The Legend of Good Women*),<sup>68</sup> I have predominantly relied on scholarship mainly by Ian Donaldson and Jan H. Blits, to discuss features such as

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<sup>62</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by David Raeburn (London: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> Harper-Scott, "Opera about Rape", p. 65.

<sup>64</sup> Livy, *The Early History of Rome* (London: Penguin, 2002).

<sup>65</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, ed. by A.J. Boyle and R.D. Woodard (London: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>66</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*.

<sup>67</sup> St Augustine, *City of God* (London: Penguin, 2003).

<sup>68</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Women* (Washington: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015).



Christianisation, implied-complicity and forgiveness. For my discussion of Shakespeare's *Lucrece*<sup>69</sup> I reverted to utilising both the historical poem and scholarship mainly from Amy Greenstadt and John Kunat, regarding Shakespeare's construction of authorial will and ambiguity in conclusion.

## Methodology

My dissertation analyses the ways in which certain elements of pre-Britten historical-poems are presented in Britten's opera and Duncan's libretto. I have attempted to clarify throughout, that Britten and Duncan did not necessarily study each of the historical poems I have chosen, nor did they necessarily base the opera on these pre-existing accounts. During my research I have noticed that many of the topics featured in Britten's opera have been presented in previous poems, and my interest lies in the way Britten and Duncan straddle multiple features at once. I will therefore be using the historical-poems of Livy, Ovid, St Augustine, Chaucer and Shakespeare, to analyse the construction of gender, rapist and raped woman, Christianity, implied-complicity, and ambiguity in conclusion, within Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*.

The method I use to analyse Britten and Duncan's *Lucretia* is essentially musico-poetic. It involves the extrapolation of details from each poem that epitomise the narrative that each poet creates, which I then compare to Britten and Duncan's *Lucretia*. Of particular interest to me, is not only the process by which Duncan expresses these features within his libretto, but the way in which these ideas are then constructed in Britten's composition and orchestration. My musico-poetic approach is a method that I have not encountered during my research; whilst many scholars do indeed discuss themes that are presented in the historical-poems and Britten's opera, they do not describe the interplay of the literary traditions I will discuss in such depth. For example, whilst Harper-Scott deplores a production of *Lucretia* in which the rape scene was removed, and criticises the following conference in which fellow participants argued that Lucretia may have been complicit in her own rape, he either rejects or fails to acknowledge historical accounts (such as

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<sup>69</sup> William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare's Poems*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones and H.R. Woudhuysen, 2 (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2007).

St Augustine's) in which implied-complicity is already an established literary tradition.<sup>70</sup>

The legend of Lucretia is frequently utilised as a metaphor to describe events external to the historical setting. For this reason, I have adopted a musico-poetic approach when analysing Britten's opera, as I believe this will yield the best results when striving to understand the external narrative he and Duncan may be metaphorically referring to. Many of the scholars I have discussed in my literature review analyse the opera as an isolated entity, their research focusing primarily on specific features (such as motivic-coding, orchestration, gender, and so on) without referring to their importance within a wider, external discourse. Throughout my thesis, I not only utilise historical poems and Britten's opera, but also the established terminology, themes and concepts of scholarship I have covered in my literature review. Therefore, I simultaneously engage with historical-poetic literary traditions and scholarly traditions.

Whilst I believe my musico-poetic approach bears the best results, it is not without its limitations. When selecting my source texts, the first challenge I faced concerned the matter of translations. None of the historical poems I have studied are in modern English, so I have had to rely heavily upon translations from Latin and Middle-English. Many subtleties in meaning and semantics may have been lost in translation, and this is potentially problematic where historically situated topics as sensitive as rape and sexual assault are concerned. I have strived to overcome this problem by utilising reliable translations of the historical poems from Penguin Classics and Arden Shakespeare, and I have supported my theories with reference to scholarship in the respective fields.

The second problem I encountered regarded the working relationship of Benjamin Britten and Ronald Duncan. Whilst Britten's *Letters from a Life Volume III* and Duncan's *Memoir* both shed light on small-scale anecdotal accounts of their creative process, certain decisions cannot be attributed to either artist.<sup>71</sup> Duncan's *Memoir* is especially cynical and potentially biased in nature, often deploring Britten's

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<sup>70</sup> Harper-Scott, "Opera about Rape".

<sup>71</sup> Mitchell, Reed, and Cooke, III; Duncan. Neither Britten or Duncan confirm attributes of decision making (for example, the inclusion of a Christian narrative) in their personal correspondence, which becomes problematic when assessing the poor reception of the opera.

response to *Lucretia's* reception. However, I have attempted to confirm attributions of decision-making by cross-referencing Duncan's *Memoir* against Britten's *Letters*.

Of over five-hundred resources regarding *Lucretia* listed in the Britten-Pears Foundation online catalogue,<sup>72</sup> none discussed the process of revisions to the score after the Lord Chamberlain's review. Duncan notes himself that Britten frequently composed using a pencil and rubber, and therefore scores pre-revision were difficult to find.<sup>73</sup> Thus, the section of my thesis in which I discuss Britten and Duncan's authorial will is informed by details of otherwise undocumented revisions of the libretto requested by the Lord Chamberlain, and reported by Paul Kildea.<sup>74</sup> I propose that whether the opera had been revised under instruction from Lord Chamberlain or not, discussion of authorial will is still valid concerning a topic in which *Lucretia's* will is not respected by Tarquinius. Where the legend of *Lucretia* is frequently used as a metaphor, discussion of authorial will that refers to not only *Lucretia*, but also Britten and Duncan is valid when concerning their motivations for composing a politically brave opera.

The Britten-Pears Foundation catalogue leads me to believe that Britten and Duncan did not own copies of the historical-poems I have discussed. This may seem problematic, as one might expect that if a certain feature appears in Britten's opera and the poetry of Ovid, there might be a link, insofar as Britten and Duncan may have studied the poetry and purposefully recreated it. When conducting and presenting my research, therefore, I have stressed the importance of my method: whilst there are indeed parallels between features of the opera and the historical-poets' work, my study does not concern the way in which Britten and Duncan imitated previous accounts, but how similar themes happen to occur in both the opera and the historical poems. This way, I can discuss the transformation of the legend of *Lucretia* as a naturally and organically developing process, as a result of historically situated attitudes. I therefore utilise my musico-poetic approach to discuss Britten and Duncan's motivations for composing *The Rape of Lucretia*, and for presenting the ideas and features that I go on to analyse.

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<sup>72</sup> Britten-Pears Foundation, 'Britten-Pears Foundation Integrated Catalogue', *Britten-Pears Foundation Integrated Catalogue* <<http://www.bpfcatalogue.org/>> [accessed 15 October 2018].

<sup>73</sup> Duncan, p. 88.

<sup>74</sup> Kildea.



### 3. Historical Poems: The Legend of Lucretia

As I will explore in section 3, the legend of Lucretia undergoes many transformations that re-appropriate the story, subvert Lucretia's virtue, and destabilise her status as an exemplum. I have selected my source texts by virtue of the origins of the legend (Livy and Ovid), Britten's musical construction of men, women, and rape (Livy, Ovid, and specifically Ovid's *Metamorphoses*), and problems presented by Britten's Lucretia regarding: Christianity (Augustine, Chaucer and Shakespeare), implied-complicity (Ovid, Augustine and Chaucer), and possibly deliberate ambiguity in conclusion (Chaucer and Shakespeare).

Harper-Scott argues that Livy and Shakespeare were cited as sources for the text of Duncan's libretto, whilst Augustine and Chaucer were not; however, I will demonstrate that Britten and Duncan followed in the traditions of the latter authors, regarding constructions of gender and rape, and subversions of narratives to include Christianity, complicity and ambiguity in conclusion.<sup>75</sup> Morales argues that myth should be perceived as a process rather than a finished product, and as such we should best understand what myth is by observing firstly what myth does. As such, myths and legends frequently undergo transformations; they are manipulated, exploited, and censored often to uphold certain behaviours, political values, and achieve cultural gain.<sup>76</sup> Zeitlin concurs, arguing that mythology is frequently used as a way of mediating social behaviour and reflecting on the human psychological and physical state.<sup>77</sup>

Morales provides the Greek myth of Europa to prove the transformative power of mythology, in which we see certain details of the myth omitted, new ones added, and the plot re-weighted. Many of these strategies are employed in the legend of Lucretia, in which similar transformations exist. In the myth of Europa, Zeus – who has taken the form of a bull – breathes saffron into Europa's mouth, after which he carries her away across a lake to have sex with her (the implication is that he rapes

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<sup>75</sup> Harper-Scott, "Opera about Rape", p. 65.

<sup>76</sup> Helen Morales, *Classical Mythology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 2–4.

<sup>77</sup> Froma Zeitlin, "Configurations of Rape in Greek Myth", in *Rape: An Historical and Social Enquiry*, ed. by Sylvana Tomaselli and Roy Porter (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 24.

her).<sup>78</sup> Since the original myth, Europa has been used as an emblem of Europe, the face of two-euro coins, and come to signify Europe in parliament. Morales argues that the second-century poet Moschus is the first to connect *Europa* (the myth) to Europe (the continent), although Europa's rape does not feature in his account.<sup>79</sup> The etymology of Europe as a continent instead relates to both Ancient Greece as the acknowledged birthplace of Western civilization, and more specifically, to the meaning of the word itself (broad-faced).<sup>80</sup> Many parallels can be drawn between the transformations of the myth of Europa and the legend of Lucretia.

This censorship and transformation exists until the Christian era, Morales argues,<sup>81</sup> and these themes of transformation and Christianisation are but some of the ideas I explore here with regards to *Lucretia*, whilst I also explore the narrative conventions of gender and rape regarding each author's output. The legend of Lucretia sees similar transformation to that of Europa; certain details are subverted, some are omitted, new ones are added, and the plot is re-weighted. As with Europa, each account of Lucretia develops a slightly different narrative and provides the reader with new cultural, political and religious themes. As such, the plurality of different accounts encourages us to interpret them comparatively, as well as separately, and this includes not only my source authors, but Duncan's libretto too; his and Britten's later account of the Lucretia legend becomes dependent on pre-existing stories, and can be used to engage the opera critic, opera goer, scholar or larger culture, in wider critical reflection.

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<sup>78</sup> Morales, p. 6.

<sup>79</sup> Morales, pp. 9–12.

<sup>80</sup> George William Lemon, *English Etymology; or a Derivative Dictionary of the English Language, I. From the Greek and Latin Languages*. (London: G. Robinson, 1783). No page numbers in original, but on page Eup-Exc.

<sup>81</sup> Morales, p. 11.

## Constructions of Gender and Rape: Livy (59 BC – AD 17) and Ovid (43 BC – AD 17)

In this section, I observe the way in which Livy and Ovid construct themes of gender and rape through their oeuvre and their individual accounts of *Lucretia*. Whilst they both lived in the same Augustan period, their accounts of Lucretia contain subtle differences that transform the legend. Assessing these specific legends alongside their greater output, I explore the transformations of myth, attitudes towards gender, and construction of rape in their poetry, and later in my thesis these observations form the basis of my discussion in relation to the music and libretto of Britten's *Lucretia*.

### Three Features in Livy and Ovid's Oeuvre and Poems of *Lucretia*

Three distinct features can be found in both Livy's *The Early History of Rome* and the works of Ovid; the first is that women are not explored at any great length, and when their characters are explored, they are given no individuality. Smethurst argues that in the first two books of *Early History*, women are disproportionately highly represented; however, their characterisation is often bare. Women's function within wider narratives is often to serve men, to bear and raise children, and to enforce and strengthen the Roman state. Women are depicted as puppets, they are treated with no legal control of their own bodies, and many are passive, unimportant and insignificant in comparison to their male counterparts.<sup>82</sup> Stevenson concurs, and provides many examples of women whose individuality is not explored; Lavinia's only function is to preserve her son Ascanius' inheritance until he reaches manhood, after the death of her husband Aeneas, and Acca Larentia's character is scarcely developed beyond her raising of two strong and formidable sons, Romulus and Remus.<sup>83</sup> A lack of character-development is found in Livy's accounts of Rhea Silvia, Hersilia, Tarpeia, The Sabine Women, and Horatia,<sup>84</sup> and parallel themes are found in the works of poet Ovid: Curran argues that in the *Metamorphoses*, Echo is a mere

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<sup>82</sup> S.E. Smethurst, "Women in Livy's "History"", *Greece & Rome*, 19.56 (1950), 80–87 (pp. 80–81).

<sup>83</sup> Tom Stevenson, "Women of Early Rome as "Exempla" in Livy, "Ab Urbe Condita", Book 1", *The Classical World*, 104.2 (2011), 175–89 (pp. 175–77).

<sup>84</sup> Stevenson, pp. 175–83.

appendage of her husband and is totally devoted to and dependent on him, Atlanta defines marriage as a loss of woman's individual identity, and the Pygmalion paints a picture of a woman as the creation of her husband – passive, compliant, and obedient.<sup>85</sup> Hejduk argues similarly regarding Ovid's *Fasti*, which explores many different female figures whose storylines are often short and fleeting.<sup>86</sup> Blamires provides many examples from Ovid's *The Art of Love* and *Amores*, wherein women are not described beyond their uncontrollable sexual desire and their efforts to outsmart and trick men.<sup>87</sup>

The second feature is that women's narrative functions and contributions are often undermined. Livy's Rhea Silvia became a Vestal Virgin to avoid bearing children (despite being obliged by the preordained mission of Rome), was 'ravished' by the God of war Mars, and gave birth to twin boys Romulus and Remus (who later founded Rome), after which she was imprisoned for her crime. Her crime opens three possibilities; that she lied about being raped; that she was blamed for her rape; that her refusal to give birth to children (as a Vestal Virgin) was a crime. Whichever stance one takes, the undermining of Rhea Silvia's sexuality as either a raped or adulterous woman, undermines her bearing of strong and powerful children – later to become powerful leaders – thus undermining the upbringing of Romulus and Remus themselves. After Amulius orders the twins be sent down the Tiber River to drown and die, they are saved by the shepherd Faustulus, who gives them to Acca Larentia to raise. Livy further undermines their upbringing; whilst Livy barely develops Acca Larentia's story, he is compelled to note that her fellow shepherds nicknamed her 'lupa' (wolf/prostitute). These implications appear to destabilise the epic origins of Rome (as founded by Romulus and Remus), and contradict the patriotic nature of his *Early History*.<sup>88</sup> It is also evident that Rhea Silvia and Acca Larentia are approached with scepticism, and women are assessed with mistrust, which is similarly found in his accounts of both the Sabine Women and Hersilia.

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<sup>85</sup> Leo Curran, "Rape and Rape Victims in the Metamorphoses", *Arethusa*, 11.1 (1978), 213–41 (p. 213).

<sup>86</sup> Julia Hejduk, "Epic Rapes in the Fasti", *Classical Philology*, 106.1 (2011), 20–31 (p. 21).

<sup>87</sup> *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed. by Alcuin Blamires (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 17–25. - Regarding the last example 'their cause of warfare', Ovid credits the cause of warfare to women, which is problematic. His example references the abduction of Helen, who was surely abducted by men, and as such, it is unfair to blame women for warfare.

<sup>88</sup> Stevenson, pp. 175–89.



Whilst attending a religious festival, the Sabine Women were captured and redistributed amongst the Roman men, to whom they became wives (the implication is that the rape of the Sabine Women by Roman men was legitimized by marriage). Later, the women discouraged war between the Sabines and Romans, and encouraged unity under the Roman name. Despite their apparent well-intentioned and positive contributions, Livy notes that the advice of the Sabine Women led to underlying tensions between the Sabines and Romans, and that they would have been regarded with scepticism by Roman readers, who would have disapproved of the women's interference in military and political affairs.<sup>89</sup> The same can be said of Hersilia, who discouraged Romulus from killing the families of captured women after the Romans defeated the Antemnates.<sup>90</sup>

Ovid's undermining of women often creates binarisms between his treatment of and attitudes towards women and men. Blamires provides examples of Ovid's work from *The Art of Love* and *Amores* in which women are portrayed as sexually uncontrollable and dangerously jealous; in this case they use their intelligence to trick, manipulate and exploit men.<sup>91</sup> Ovid creates these personas from the eyes of a (rather condescending, derisive and demeaning) male narrator, so the implied binarism is such that whilst a woman is sexually uncontrollable, men are strong-willed and restrained; whilst a woman is dangerously jealous, a man is self-assured; and whilst a woman uses her intelligence to trick men, men use their intelligence for honest good.

Many of these binarisms are already faulty; whilst Blamires argues that Ovid aims to be even-handed in his treatment of the sexes, Ovid often creates male characters in the *Metamorphoses* that are sexually uncontrollable, jealous, and manipulative.<sup>92</sup> *The Art of Love* and *Amores* are frequently inlaid with dark connotations of men by virtue of their denunciation of women. Ovid frequently encourages men to take advantage of women's uncontrollable sexual desire, they are taught not to trust women (arguably this paranoia could fall under a similar umbrella to the women's supposed jealousy), and they are advised to persist with

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<sup>89</sup> Stevenson, pp. 179–81.

<sup>90</sup> Stevenson, pp. 177–78.

<sup>91</sup> Blamires, pp. 18–25.

<sup>92</sup> Blamires, p. 17.

seduction even if the woman resists (but why would a woman resist if they are sexually uncontrollable?).<sup>93</sup> Ovid argues that the word 'no' is simply a promise, and that any woman wishes to be overcome with enough encouragement – 'Her chastity consists in not having been asked'.<sup>94</sup> These double standards create paradoxes between men and women's behaviour: if women are sexually active they are condemned, whilst men are encouraged to be sexually active; however, when a woman chooses not to be sexually active, men are encouraged to force through this decision. Either way, a sexually active or inactive woman is criticised and considered to be at fault, whilst men are encouraged to be sexually persistent to the point of sexual assault and rape.

The third recurring feature of these early accounts is the open, unresolved nature of women as exempla. An exemplum is the use of a certain aspect of a historical story to encourage (or even discourage) a certain behaviour amongst a group of people, through self-reflection and regulation. The certain aspect may be the events of the story, the central character, or the whole story in its entirety.<sup>95</sup> Whilst many exempla remain open for this purpose, it is noticeable that men's status as exempla tend to be wholly positive or wholly negative, whilst women's status as exempla appear to be much more problematic and contradictory.<sup>96</sup> When the king of the Sabines, Titus Tatius, asked Tarpeia to let his troops into the Capitol, Tarpeia agreed on the account that she receive the items the troops carried on their left arms. Known for her greed, Tarpeia desired their gold jewellery, but was instead suffocated and killed when the troops threw their shields on her.<sup>97</sup> Superficially, one might distinguish Tarpeia is an exemplum of greed, and that her suffocation was her righteous punishment. However, after the troops killed her and entered the citadel, they were defeated by the Romans, suggesting the possibility that Tarpeia used her reputation for greed, sacrificing her life to defeat the Romans.<sup>98</sup> An initially negative exemplum of greed is now destabilised into an exemplum of greed (negative) used

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<sup>93</sup> Ovid, "Ovid: From The Art of Love and Amores", in *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended*, ed. by Alcuin Blamires (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 18–21.

<sup>94</sup> Ovid, "The Art of Love and Amores", p. 17.

<sup>95</sup> Langlands, p. 79.

<sup>96</sup> Langlands, p. 80.

<sup>97</sup> Stevenson, pp. 178–79.

<sup>98</sup> Stevenson, pp. 178–79.

for the greater good of the Romans (positive), and is left open for interpretation by means of contradiction.

The use of these three features in Livy and Ovid's oeuvres is fully realised within each of their historical poems of *Lucretia*. Whilst both accounts are unified in various similarities, many subtle differences can be found in each legend (some of which I will explore within this section, but some of which I will come back to later) that destabilise Lucretia's status as an exemplum.

Firstly, in both accounts, Lucretia's character is not explored in any great depth. She is first found spinning wool with her maids, and hurries to greet her husband at his arrival in Livy's account.<sup>99</sup> Ovid creates a persona for Lucretia which involves only her longing for Collatinus, which has her burst into tears just before his arrival, and as such her character is not developed beyond spinning wool, depending on her husband, and being emotional.<sup>100</sup> Lucretia becomes the active agent of the story only when planning to commit suicide, but only in Livy's account does she order vengeance from her husband and father.<sup>101</sup>

Brutus is the focus of much of Livy's account, a character whose function is such that he acts upon Lucretia's cry for vengeance, and in a truly Ovidian metamorphoses, throws off his charade of stupidity to reveal a brave and defiant soldier.<sup>102</sup> In Ovid's account Lucretia is reluctant to speak of her rape and the shame she feels, and does not demand vengeance from her husband, father, or Brutus (who up until now is not said to be present). Brutus instead demands vengeance for Lucretia despite her reluctant and private shame, after which Ovid briefly describes the overthrow of the Etruscan monarchy.<sup>103</sup> In Livy's account, much of the story focuses on Brutus's uprising rather than Lucretia's private shame. We are therefore not meant to read *Lucretia* with sympathy for Lucretia, but with admiration for Brutus.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Livy, pp. 100–101.

<sup>100</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, p. 50.

<sup>101</sup> Schwebel, p. 34.

<sup>102</sup> Livy, pp. 102–4.

<sup>103</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, pp. 51–53.

<sup>104</sup> Livy, pp. 102–4.

Herein lies the catch of each story: in each account, Lucretia is overshadowed not only by the male characters, but she is also situated within a wider, external narrative that reinstates her purely as a metaphor. Both Livy and Ovid's accounts begin with the unlawful and unjust rule of the Etruscan monarchy over the Roman people, and end with the overthrow of the Etruscan monarchy by the Roman people. The rape of Lucretia simply becomes a metaphor for the rape of Rome, when her suicide that resolves her rape is immediately followed by the overthrow/death of the monarchy, which resolves the figurative rape of Rome. The result of this external narrative and the metaphor it creates, is that in the legend of Lucretia, Lucretia is not necessarily the central character or theme.<sup>105</sup>

Jed argues that this codification, this connection between rape and liberation, has been instilled in the story of Lucretia for so long, not only because the connection seems logical, but because it is presented as law by Livy, who gives the story a legal setting. Furthermore, whilst she argues that *Lucretia* need not be bookended by external events time and time again, the chastity contest of the male characters is also an unnecessary device that – when observed alongside Brutus' uprising – proves the crux of the story to lie in the re-distribution of power amongst men.<sup>106</sup> Salt is added to the wound when one realises that the only (superficial) characteristics assigned to Lucretia, of spinning, beauty, and loyalty to her husband, would not have been explored at all had she not been raped.

Secondly, in both accounts Lucretia's character, actions, and the actions inflicted upon her are undermined. In both accounts, Lucretia's beauty and chastity (which are both regarded as positive traits) kindle Tarquinius' sexual desire and result in his desire to rape her. Curran argues that in the *Metamorphoses*, beauty is often an invitation to rape, and that youth and fear enhance man's desire.<sup>107</sup> It is consequently noticeable that in the *Fasti*, Ovid describes Lucretia's beauty in terms of her 'snowy complexion', and both Ovid and Livy allude to Lucretia's fear as she is about to be raped.<sup>108</sup> It is no illusion that Tarquinius is the villain of the story, that it is his attraction to Lucretia's beauty and chastity that causes his desire to rape her, but

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<sup>105</sup> Schwebel, p. 33.

<sup>106</sup> Stephanie Jed, *Chaste Thinking* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 9.

<sup>107</sup> Curran, pp. 226–28.

<sup>108</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, p. 50.

considering the undermining of women is already an established theme of much of Livy and Ovid's work, it is impossible to observe their writing without, firstly, noting their compulsion to forefront the chastity and beauty of the raped woman, and secondly, comparing this story to their wider output in which the woman is so often blamed. Ovid creates a similar picture of Daphne, Caenis, Herse, Arethusa, and Philomela in the *Metamorphoses*, in which we see them curse their own beauty as a justification for their rape. Daphne, Europa and Leucothoe's beauty is also enhanced by fear, and Daphne's dishevelled hair and clothes foreshadow the laurel tree she transforms into as she takes refuge in complete abandonment of humanity.<sup>109</sup>

This blame imposed on Lucretia and other characters for traits entirely personal to them, is arguably an internal blame; however, in Ovid's account, external forces blame Lucretia, as both her father and husband 'pardon what she was forced to do' after she admits to her rape.<sup>110</sup> To 'pardon' someone is to imply that they may be at fault. As she was forced by threat of dishonour to have sex with Tarquinius, it is concerning that anyone would 'pardon' her for a crime she did not commit. Similar external blame is found in Ovid's story of Perimele, whose father found her rape so unbearable he cast her off a cliff to her death, and Leucothoe, buried alive by her father as punishment for her crime.<sup>111</sup> Not only men blame women for their rapes, as Ovid's Juno frequently punishes raped women once their rape is revealed; she drives Io insane and transforms her into a cow-human hybrid after her rape by Jupiter, and transforms the graceful Callisto into an awkward bear after her rape, also by Jupiter.<sup>112</sup>

Thirdly, Lucretia's status as an exemplum is left open, and this is a feature that I will explore in more depth in the remainder of my thesis, regarding the transformation of the legend through manipulation and subversion. However, it is significant that two stories of Lucretia written in the same period already present subtle differences that destabilise Lucretia's status as an exemplum.

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<sup>109</sup> Curran, pp. 226–30.

<sup>110</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, p. 52.

<sup>111</sup> Curran, p. 224.

<sup>112</sup> Curran, p. 225.

In Ovid's account, Lucretia is stunned into silence by Tarquinius' presence, she sends for her husband and father after her rape, is silent and fails to speak three times before confessing her rape, and does not order vengeance (although Brutus vows to avenge Lucretia after her death anyway).<sup>113</sup> Livy's account sees Tarquinius order Lucretia's silence (perhaps she would have spoken, if provided with the chance), and Lucretia send for her husband, father, and a trusted friend of each after her rape, respond to Collatinus as soon as he asks what is wrong, and order vengeance from the men present.<sup>114</sup> The reader is presented with two varying characters, in which Ovid's Lucretia is reluctant, defeated and passive, and Livy's is confident, empowered and active (during and post-rape). These traits are summed up in the enacted vengeance, in which Ovid's Brutus asserts his own vow of vengeance over Lucretia after her death (arguably a second metaphorical rape due to the use of her body and death without her consent) as an active agent.<sup>115</sup> As a stark contrast, Livy's Brutus follows Lucretia's vow for vengeance as the passive agent.<sup>116</sup>

In each story, Lucretia's purpose as an exemplum is to encourage virtue to women, loyalty to their husbands, and death upon women who are adulterous (one of many paradoxes of this legend being Lucretia's innocence in her rape, but the inevitable disbelief she will face if she lives). However, Ovid's account creates a Lucretia who is reluctant to speak of her shame, despite her known condemnation of adultery and disloyalty. It is therefore difficult to understand the nature and intent of her status as an exemplum when compared to Livy's Lucretia, who exacts vengeance resolutely and defiantly. Addressed simply, Ovid's Lucretia is private, and Livy's Lucretia is public. Differences between the stories initially perceived as subtle, in fact have the effect of reshaping Lucretia's character and purpose entirely, resulting in a destabilised status as an exemplum.

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<sup>113</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, pp. 48–53.

<sup>114</sup> Livy, pp. 100–104.

<sup>115</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, p. 52.

<sup>116</sup> Livy, p. 102.

## Characterisation of Gender and Rape: Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Using these three features, I have explored the difference in treatment of men and women with regards to their character development, role and stability of character, and I have occasionally explored themes of blame and status as exemplum concerning the rape of female characters including Lucretia. Whilst Lucretia is situated in Ovid's *Fasti*, it is in his *Metamorphoses* that raped women, male rapists, and the act of rape tend to be described in much more creative terms. Whilst Britten and Duncan do not cite Ovid as a source for either the compositional score or libretto, the score and libretto together often follow in the tradition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; Britten, too, utilises themes of nature, animals and transformation to portray pivotal themes of gender and rape in the opera.

As I described earlier, as Daphne flees Apollo to avoid rape, her fear is characterised by a complete abandonment of human state as she transforms into a laurel tree. A similar abandonment of human nature is found in Syrinx (who frequently avoids rape) as she flees Pan, as she transforms into hollow water-reeds. After Io is raped by Jupiter and driven mad by Juno, her new psychological state is mirrored in her physical appearance as she is transformed into a cow-woman hybrid, so unrecognisable that she attempts to flee her own reflection.<sup>117</sup> In each of these three examples we see the female characters come to represent the fear of their attack at various stages: Syrinx escapes Pan successfully and endures no attack; Daphne's abandonment of human nature as a laurel tree begins during the process of escaping Apollo; and Io's transformation occurs after her rape, representing the memory of her trauma.

Men's physicality and psychological state is also described. Boraes' sexual virility is described ever more potently in naturalistic terms as a powerful storm, as he attempts (and fails) to seduce, and prepares to rape Orithyia.<sup>118</sup> Birds and flight are often used to describe men and women before, during, and after rape as a binarism. In the story of Philomela, all three characters are transformed into birds: she and her sister Procne as they flee Tereus; Tereus as he pursues the women (alluding to themes of a predator stalking its prey). A similar binarism of predator and prey

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<sup>117</sup> Curran, pp. 230, 217, 224–25.

<sup>118</sup> Curran, p. 218.

through birds and flight is used in Ovid's account of Mercury and Herse. Herse is seen amongst a group of girls by Mercury, who has transformed into a Kite, circling in the air above. After he selects Herse, he is compared to a leaden bullet; his sexuality likened to growing heat, friction, flight, and the danger of potential injury and/or death.<sup>119</sup>

Arethusa's attempted escape from Alpheus is similarly likened to a dove and a hawk, before Diana comes to Arethusa's aid and engulfs her in darkness. At this point, Arethusa transforms into a cloud; however, Alpheus recognises her in her new physical state, also transforms into a cloud, and co-mingles with (metaphorically rapes) her. Whilst the theme of birds and flight are used numerously to portray physical pursuit and escape, transformations are also used to describe the legitimate human fears of Ovid's characters. Arethusa is not only blinded by Diana – depicting the human fear of darkness – but also experiences the vulnerability of her nakedness before, during and after her attack. Io is similarly engulfed by the darkness of Jupiter during her attack, and Thetis is bound by Peleus twice, representing claustrophobia.<sup>120</sup>

Whilst Curran foregrounds Ovid's exploration of rape simultaneously as an outrage committed unto woman and a gross caricature of male sexual desire, he concludes that Ovid's accounts of raped women are sincere and well-conceived, no matter the extremity of comedy, hyperbole, and burlesque invoked in the poetry.<sup>121</sup> However, as I have previously discussed, Blamires provides many examples of Ovid's output which encourage violence and distrust towards women; work that, when compared alongside the *Metamorphoses*, seems entirely un-sympathetic.<sup>122</sup> Nonetheless, Britten's compositional choices often follow in the tradition of Ovid's animalistic and naturalistic creativity, and Britten's possible relation to this creativity may have implications for his own attitudes towards, and musical construction of gender and rape.

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<sup>119</sup> Curran, pp. 235–36.

<sup>120</sup> Curran, p. 232.

<sup>121</sup> Curran, p. 218.

<sup>122</sup> Ovid, "The Art of Love and Amores", pp. 17–23.



## Christianity, Complicity and Ambiguity in Conclusion: Augustine, Chaucer and Shakespeare

In this section, I will observe the way in which the narrative of the legend of Lucretia according to Livy and Ovid is transformed and manipulated by the addition and subtraction of details, the process of ‘undercutting’ through subversion, and the re-emphasis of certain sections of each narrative. Through these transformations I hope to examine similar themes from the previous section, particularly regarding the portrayal of gender and rape; however, the emphasis of this section is to explain Augustine’s introduction of a Christian narrative and Lucretia’s complicity, the further undercuts posed by Chaucer and Shakespeare, and the individual intentions of these authors. Whilst Britten cited Shakespeare as an influence behind the opera, he did not cite Augustine or Chaucer. Later in my thesis, however, I will argue that Augustine’s subversion of Lucretia’s virtue through the introduction of a Christian narrative, Britten’s familiarity with the poetry of Chaucer, and the issue of authorial will posed by Shakespeare, may also have influenced the narrative of the opera. Within my thesis, I refer to the central character of each account utilising the common spelling used by scholars: Augustine’s account regarding ‘Lucretia’; Chaucer and Shakespeare’s, ‘Lucrece’.

### Christian Subversion: St Augustine of Hippo (AD 345–430)

St Augustine of Hippo’s account of *The Rape of Lucretia* (circa AD 413) is best known for its subversion of Lucretia’s status as a commended virtuous Roman exemplum, into a problematic and condemned figure of vanity in the eyes of the Christian author. The first to condemn Lucretia, Augustine’s account directly opposes not only Livy’s Roman narrative, but the more sympathetic Christian stories according to St Ambrose, St Jerome, and Tertullian, even though all three supported the suicides of raped, Christian women.<sup>123</sup> *Lucretia* appears in an early chapter of Augustine’s *The City of God*, a work written during the sack of Rome by Alaric and the Goths in AD 410, a time in which a number of Christian nuns had been raped.<sup>124</sup> Augustine praised the nuns’ decision to live on after their rape, and wrote *Lucretia*,

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<sup>123</sup> Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and Its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 25.

<sup>124</sup> Donaldson, pp. 25, 29.

amongst other stories, to reinstate Christian moral values as the societal and religious norm after pagans believed the sacking of Rome was a sign of disapproval from their gods for abandoning their faith.<sup>125</sup>

By undermining Lucretia's pagan virtue, Augustine creates an account that belittles the moral values of Roman women and, in turn, encourages them to consider Christian values. Donaldson argues that the key to Augustine's subversion lies in the Christian culture he imposes upon the plot; whereas Romans believe in public reputation and honour (what Donaldson coins a 'shame culture'), Christians believe only in the judgement of God (coined 'guilt culture').<sup>126</sup> Blits argues similarly, that whilst Christians distinguish between moral worth and public reputation, Romans unite the two; 'honour' is used interchangeably in Roman text to mean both virtue and reputation, and this is important because an honourable Roman is required to be simultaneously good in virtue and good in reputation.<sup>127</sup> Augustine, however, distinguishes between virtue (Lucretia should be considered virtuous after her rape, for it is not her crime) and reputation (public reputation is of no importance), and utilising this distinction, undercuts Livy's moral narrative. Where Livy's Lucretia is justified in her suicide by the implication that others may believe her to be adulterous if she lives, Augustine's Lucretia is not justified in her suicide; if she knows she is pure at heart (and God knows this too), she has no reason to die. Through *Lucretia*, Augustine aims to discourage women's concern for chastity for chastity's sake, arguing that if one's mind is pure, it does not matter what is done to one's body by another. Therefore, he does not regard suicide as heroic, but rather it is an act of 'spiritually impatient self-murder'.<sup>128</sup>

This paradox is the crux of Augustine's narrative, since if Lucretia commits suicide, she will always be guilty of at least one crime. If she truly is raped, and therefore not guilty of adultery, her act of self-murder is unjustified and therefore a crime; if she is not truly raped, and therefore implied to be complicit and/or

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<sup>125</sup> Eleanor Glendinning, "Reinventing Lucretia: Rape, Suicide and Redemption from Classical Antiquity to the Medieval Era", 20.1 (2013), 61–82 (p. 70) <<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12138-013-0322-y>>.

<sup>126</sup> Donaldson, p. 34.

<sup>127</sup> Jan H. Blits, "Redeeming Lost Honour: Shakespeare's Rape of Lucrece", *The Review of Politics*, 71.3, 411–27 (p. 413).

<sup>128</sup> Donaldson, p. 33. Donaldson notes that whilst the Old and New Testament do not directly condemn the act of suicide, it was common that Christians (including Augustine) did.

consensual, she is guilty of adultery, and therefore justified in committing suicide (although her act of suicide unlawfully foregoes a fair trial, in which an adulterous woman would typically be put to death – this point is not dwelt upon).<sup>129</sup> The instability of this paradox, therefore, successfully discourages women both from adultery and suicide, although it offers no solution to raped women who may be perceived to be adulterous despite their known innocence (in their own and in God's eyes).

Donaldson asserts that in Coluccio Salutati and Bandello's accounts of *Lucretia*, Lucretia struggles to prevent her body from feeling pleasure as she is raped,<sup>130</sup> and Schwebel argues similarly that Augustine's Lucretia is implied to be complicit and 'seduced by her own lust'.<sup>131</sup> It is this addition upon and subversion of Livy's narrative that further destabilises her status as an exemplum of loyalty and virtue, and many scholars have read Augustine's Lucretia's suicide as confirmation of her guilt and her implied-complicity. However, it may be a failure of authors and scholars alike, that they cannot perceive any possible explanation for Lucretia's guilt beside her implied-complicity.<sup>132</sup> Perhaps, therefore, Augustine could have offered an account in which the raped Lucretia was not implied to be complicit, as this addition of complicity is not entirely necessary in condemning her suicide; the Christian issue of her judgement before God would still stand against the Roman's concern for judgement before fellow Roman people.

### Defending Lucretia: Geoffrey Chaucer (1340–1400)

Geoffrey Chaucer's account of *The Legend of Lucrece* appeared in the *Legend of Good Women* (1386) and was written in part to atone for the offence caused to women by his *Troilus and Criseyde* (in which the female betrays her male lover). Writing for male and female audiences, and exploring stories of chivalry and courtly games, Chaucer frequently used female characters to explore the theme of being an

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<sup>129</sup> Schwebel, pp. 39–40.

<sup>130</sup> Donaldson, p. 36.

<sup>131</sup> Schwebel, p. 40.

<sup>132</sup> Donaldson, p. 37. – This implied-complicity is a theme I have previously discussed with regards to Ovid's *Lucretia*; however, Augustine's is a direct response to Livy's, which contains no narrative of complicity, which is why I refer to Augustine's 'introduction' of a complicity narrative.

outsider, often to critique men and patriarchal ideologies.<sup>133</sup> His female characters are often set far in the past, in such a way that Chaucer is able to ‘think his way into’ their ideology with a critical distance that separates him not only from their objective experience, but the possible critique he may face for historical accuracy;<sup>134</sup> however, scholars and readers have frequently praised Chaucer for his historical accuracy and sympathy, and his ability to treat moral issues with sensitivity.<sup>135</sup>

The language and structure of Chaucer’s *Lucrece* is based largely on the same story of Ovid, and Ovid, Livy and Augustine are cited at the beginning of the poem (although he does not mention them again), in the old-English text “As seyth Ovyde and Titus Lyvius... The grete Austyn hath gret compassion Of this Lucrese”.<sup>136</sup> Schwebel finds these citations peculiar in their representation of each author. Chaucer dwells on Lucrece’s private sorrow as she is reluctant to speak to her family post-rape. This contrasts directly with Livy’s Lucretia, who is assertive in revealing Tarquin’s actions, commanding vengeance, and committing suicide. Chaucer claims Augustine to be sympathetic to Lucrece’s plight, whereas Augustine in fact condemns Lucretia for her concern for public reputation and subsequent suicide.<sup>137</sup> At the end of the poem, Chaucer asserts that Lucrece was “*holden there A seynt*” by the Roman people,<sup>138</sup> a claim that belies the pagan, pre-Christian setting, and undercuts both the pagan-Roman figure portrayed by Livy, and the condemned Christian figure depicted by Augustine.<sup>139</sup> For the avoidance of any doubt, Chaucer also has Lucrece swoon and faint as Tarquinius threatens her with dishonour, before she is raped, an addition that denies once and for all any possibility that she encouraged Tarquinius or was complicit in her rape (as posed by Augustine).<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Glendinning, p. 73.

<sup>134</sup> Andrew Galloway, "Chaucer’s Legend of Lucrece and the Critique of Ideology in Fourteenth-Century England", *ELH*, 60.4 (1993), 813–32 (p. 825).

<sup>135</sup> Galloway, p. 826.

<sup>136</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Legend of Lucrece", in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry Dean Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 618.

<sup>137</sup> Schwebel, p. 31, 36.

<sup>138</sup> Chaucer, "The Legend of Lucrece", p. 620.

<sup>139</sup> Glendinning, p. 75. Interestingly, in Medieval terms, the word ‘legend’ is often used to describe accounts of Christian women, and Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women* includes ten accounts of heroines from Classical mythology, Glendinning, p.73

<sup>140</sup> Schwebel, p. 42.

Whilst Chaucer's account is the first I have discussed to feature Lucrece as the central character (others often focusing on an external narrative, or Brutus' overthrow of the Etruscan monarchy), Lucrece is still utilised as a metaphor to illustrate the shortcomings of the patriarchal system that oppresses her.<sup>141</sup> Whilst Chaucer successfully undermines both Livy's Roman and Augustine's Christian settings, he foregrounds a scenario in which Lucrece's fate lies in the hands of men, no matter the faith and setting within which she is situated. It is tempting, therefore, to assume Chaucer's outcome of Lucrece's suicide is? similar to that of Livy's. Where public reputation is the deciding factor, it matters not whether the woman is known to be chaste in her own mind, for this agency belongs to the public. This problem is unwittingly echoed in Augustine's subverted narrative, which offers no solution to raped women who are perceived to be adulterous. However, the difference lies in Chaucer's treatment of Lucrece's rape by her male acquaintances, who 'forgive' her.

It is this forgiveness, this implication that Lucrece is in some way to blame for the rape done unto her, that drives her to commit suicide; thus, Lucrece did not die purely to uphold her reputation, but because the men immediate to her are ready to blame her implicitly for a crime she did not commit. Chaucer's implication of Lucrece's supposed blame is similar to that of Augustine's; however, where Augustine instils Lucretia's own complicity within her, Chaucer has her male acquaintances implicitly blame her, regardless of her own perceived innocence.<sup>142</sup> Herein lies the crux of Chaucer's narrative: Lucrece commits suicide due to the perception of her rape by others (specifically men) and to consolidate the reputation of her husband Collatinus, but ultimately upholds the patriarchal values that caused her rape in the first place; thus, at the heart of the narrative is Chaucer's critique of patriarchal values. Her status as an exemplum has therefore transformed from virtuous by Livy, to condemned by Augustine, to open-ended by Chaucer. Whilst Chaucer's account may be considered inconclusive, it at least portrays Lucrece as an authentically chaste woman, raped without any hint of complicity.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Schwebel, p. 36.

<sup>142</sup> Galloway, p. 827.

<sup>143</sup> Glendinning, p. 74.

## Ambiguity in Conclusion, and Authorial Will: William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

William Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) was written in the sixteenth century, at a time when England was ruled by Queen Elizabeth I, not as an absolute monarchy, but as a monarchical republic that comprised the Queen, the court, and other political bodies.<sup>144</sup> *Lucrece* has been argued to represent the shortcomings of not listening to one's counsel, a direct criticism of the absolutist and arbitrary tendencies associated with the Queen.<sup>145</sup> Shakespeare's epic poem of *Lucrece* is the first account I have discussed to re-weight a large portion of the plot to Lucrece's speech before she is raped by Tarquin (therefore undercutting previous stories such as Livy's, in which Lucretia is silent), in which period both characters discuss at length the complications the rape may inflict upon each of them.<sup>146</sup> Donaldson argues that Shakespeare fails to arrive at any moral conclusion, instead focusing on the psychological stress and anxieties of the central characters in a situation where clear, logical thinking is a necessity.<sup>147</sup> Tarquin is compelled only to understand the implications of Lucrece's speech after she has committed suicide, and as such Shakespeare's *Lucrece* becomes both a warning to Elizabeth to listen to her counsel or be branded a tyrant, and a call to arms to his contemporary *Lucreces* (that is, the wronged public) to impose violence or action upon said tyrants (implied by Lucrece's call for vengeance).<sup>148</sup>

Greenstadt develops the parallel further. In giving Lucrece several paragraphs of dramatic speech before her rape, Shakespeare succeeds in incorporating his own authorial will into Lucrece's dialogue. Authorial will, in this sense, is the author's intention, which is to be perceived, interpreted, and acted upon by the person addressed. Therefore, once Lucrece has proposed her speech to Tarquin aiming to dissuade him from raping her, it is ultimately his decision what he does with this information. Similarly, in publishing *Lucrece*, Shakespeare's poem is open to the

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<sup>144</sup> John Kunat, "Rape and Republicanism in Shakespeare's *Lucrece*", *Studies in English Literature, 1500 - 1900; Baltimore*, 55.1 (2015), 1–20 (p. 1).

<sup>145</sup> Kunat, p. 2.

<sup>146</sup> Kunat, p. 7.

<sup>147</sup> Donaldson, pp. 40–41.

<sup>148</sup> Kunat, p. 5.

interpretation of any reader, who may act upon the information in any way they see fit. Lucrece's speech ultimately fails, Tarquin rapes her, and she endures further rapes to her will when her husband Collatine and father Lucretius bicker over their proprietorial rights of her dead body, Brutus re-appropriates her command for vengeance, and her demand for the death of Tarquin is completely ignored.<sup>149</sup> Similarly, Shakespeare's epic poem may be open to any number of interpretations and re-appropriations post-publication, and after Shakespeare's death.

Donaldson argues that Shakespeare's *Lucrece* is problematic in its pagan/Christian blending. Whilst Shakespeare's narrator alludes to Christian themes within the poem – "*The blackest sin is cleared with absolution*"<sup>150</sup> – also referring to themes of heaven and hell, angels and devils, and saints and sinners, he is neither conclusive in confirming or denying its pagan or Christian setting.<sup>151</sup> Shakespeare frequently engages with and acknowledges Augustinian themes of Christian subversion, only to disregard them and allow the story to follow its original pagan narrative; subsequently the poem gives a constant sense of problems perceived but not solved.<sup>152</sup> Blits defends Shakespeare briefly from former accusations that his Roman characters often resemble 'Englishmen in togas', asserting that *Lucrece*, indecisive in its pagan or Christian setting, creates an account that is neither truly authentic to Rome, nor patriotic to England. Instead we are presented with an account that is indifferent to both Roman and English nationalities, and pagan and Christian faiths.<sup>153</sup> The subsequent consequences of this decision are, firstly, that it remains ambiguous through which faith (pagan or Christian) the poem should be read; secondly, the extent to which Shakespeare intends Lucretia to be an exemplum of positive or negative moral-value is unclear.

After Morales' discussion of the transformations of the rape of Europa, she later turns to a different but equally interesting and valid case study that bears similarities to the legend of Lucretia. Describing Prometheus, she describes two versions of the figure: the first a statue in the Rockefeller Centre in New York; the

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<sup>149</sup> Amy Greenstadt, "'Read It in Me': The Authors Will in *Lucrece*", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 57.1, 45–70 (pp. 46, 49, 68–69).

<sup>150</sup> Shakespeare, p. 365.

<sup>151</sup> Donaldson, p. 45.

<sup>152</sup> Donaldson, p. 56.

<sup>153</sup> Blits, pp. 411–12.

second, the title of Tony Harrison's film. Whilst the first is a garishly adorned, capitalist and liberal depiction, representing self-sacrifice and challenge against state authority, the second represents the devastating effects of technological misuse to identify socialist struggle. These two statues, both representing the same myth, contain two totally opposing narratives, both geared towards different political and cultural gain. Similarly, the legend of Lucretia is often embedded with differences that drastically change and adapt the narrative of the legend. It is the process of plurality that allows us to observe the myths relationally and assess them by means of comparison.<sup>154</sup>

This is exactly the process by which I have assessed the legend of Lucretia so far, and endeavour to continue in my analysis of Britten and Duncan's opera and libretto. Augustine's account depends heavily on the condemnation of Livy's due to its subversion of faith, and Chaucer's account denounces the complicity implied by Augustine, and the pagan faith posed by Livy directly. Shakespeare's is perhaps the most dramatic transformation. He is the first poet I have discussed to expand a relatively short story to such a grand scale; but its significance lies not just in its enormity, but its re-weighting of narrative in favour of Lucrece (rather than Brutus) and its indecision of faith and ambiguity in conclusion.

My research thus far has depended entirely on comparing the myths relationally; as such, the themes of Christianity, implied-complicity, and ambiguity in conclusion will be discussed regarding Britten's opera later in my thesis. An issue that I have come to deal with frequently, is commonly referred to as the 'timelessness of myth', the concept that the narrative of a specific myth is universal and infinite in its effect. Morales disputes this claim: whilst she believes that the basic, skeletal 'lore' of a particular myth or legend may remain and continue, it is the subversion, omission and addition of details that pertain to its historicity; that is to say, a myth becomes historically situated in the time it was written.<sup>155</sup> Augustine's *Lucretia* may never have existed had he not needed to discourage real, raped women from committing suicide. Chaucer's may never have existed, had he not needed to atone for his previous works and felt compelled to condemn patriarchal

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<sup>154</sup> Morales, pp. 32–38.

<sup>155</sup> Morales, pp. 13, 32.



values. Shakespeare's may never have existed had he not felt the desire to critique Queen Elizabeth I's reign.

It is with these themes of mythological transformation and plurality, and the themes explored regarding Livy and Ovid's construction of gender and rape, that I will approach and assess the music and libretto of Britten and Duncan's *Lucretia*. Whilst many of the critics and scholars I examined in my literature review dispute the Christianisation and ambiguous conclusion of Britten's *Lucretia*, many of them also fail to acknowledge and engage with the poetry (or indeed other poetry and literature) I have examined. Once more regarding the rape of Europa, Morales argues that in the cartoon *Die Euro Kids*, the children observe an original painting of Europa. Not only is the rape censored, but the painting is positioned in a museum and therefore removed from its original context.<sup>156</sup> The consequence is enormous, though we may not immediately realise it – when all context is lost, we have no idea how the painting may have originally been observed and perceived by its Roman viewers. This is the problem I aim to tackle: whilst I endeavour to compare relationally Britten's account of *Lucretia* with prior literary accounts, I also intend to historically situate Britten's work, to gain an understanding of the metaphor Britten attempts to convey.

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<sup>156</sup> Morales, p. 19.

## 4. Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*

In the first half of my thesis I have explored key features within the poetry on Lucretia by Livy, Ovid, Augustine, Chaucer and Shakespeare, in order to gain an understanding of the historical placement and context of Britten's opera. Many of these features regarding gender, rape, faith, complicity and conclusion relate to the textual and compositional thematic material within the opera, and it is these themes that have shaped opera criticism and scholarship for years following *Lucretia's* premiere.

In addition to textual developments from the previous historical poems to Duncan's libretto, the legend is enhanced and elevated through creative and effective composition and orchestration for a reduced orchestral ensemble. Therefore, in this half of my thesis, I will follow the same structure as I followed in the first, relating the works of Livy & Ovid, and Augustine, Chaucer & Shakespeare to the musical score and libretto of Britten and Duncan.

In the first part of section 4, I will compare the relationship between Britten's musical score and the legends of Lucretia according to Livy and Ovid, also drawing upon the animalistic and naturalistic creativity of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Britten employed a variety of motivic devices and orchestral effects to conjure similar imagery to Ovid, insofar as characters within the opera are portrayed using animalistic or naturalistic imagery. This musical symbolism often extends beyond a simple metaphor, speaking volumes of the relationship between men and women, Tarquinius and Lucretia, and of depictions of rape.

In the second part of section 4, I will explore the relationship between both Britten's musical score and Duncan's libretto, to the historical legends of Lucretia according to Augustine, Chaucer and Shakespeare. The opera contains a dense narrative, and straddles many of the issues posed by these authors simultaneously: I will therefore explore Lucretia's complicity, implied by Augustine; the forgiveness of men, included by Chaucer; and ambiguity in conclusion, created by Shakespeare.

Finally, in the third part of section 4, I will explore the effect of such ambiguity in the opera's conclusion, upon the criticism the opera received. As I previously

argued, the opera was forced to undergo last-minute revisions that possibly affected the narrative of the plot. Here it will be important to understand the authorial will of Britten and Duncan, in order to gain an understanding of the opera's message.

I have provided a diagram and a table below. The diagram outlines the key sections of the opera that I have studied in the context of this project: the sections I have studied in depth are underlined, with brackets above referring to the corresponding chapters in which I have discussed them, asterisks referring to sections in which the rape motif occurs, hash signs referring to sections in which a Christian narrative is employed, and plus signs referring to the recurring River Tiber sections. The section titles I have referred to (for example, "Rome is now ruled by the Etruscan upstart") correspond to the Aldeburgh Festival Ensemble's recording of *Lucretia*.<sup>157</sup> The table outlines the developments in the transformation of the legend of Lucretia, and how such transformations are then presented in Britten and Duncan's *Lucretia*.

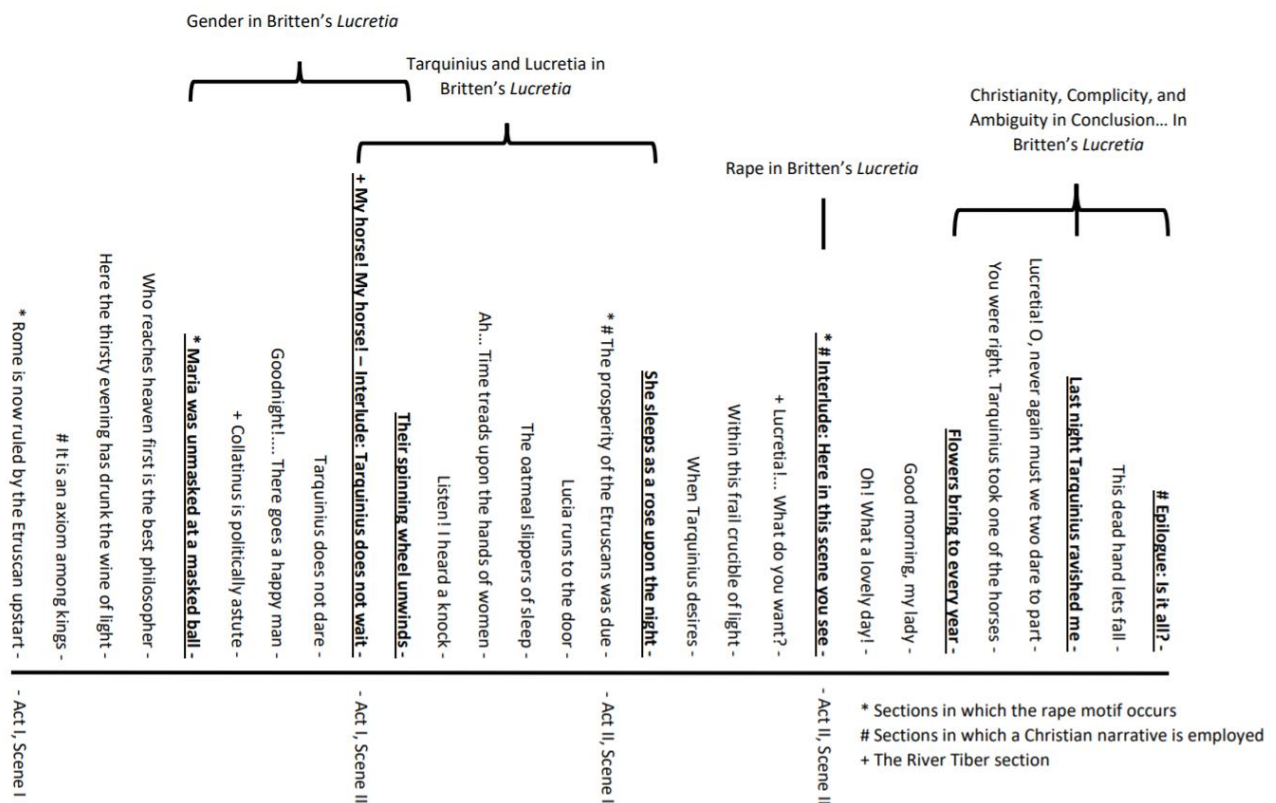


Diagram 1: Diagram outlining the key sections of Britten's *Lucretia* that I have discussed.

<sup>157</sup> Aldeburgh Festival Ensemble.

<i>Lucretia</i> by:	Written in:	Important features
Livy	<i>The Early History of Rome</i> – (Livy, 59 BC – AD 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Lucretia is active</u> in this account, as she demands vengeance from her family and Brutus. Brutus then follows her orders and leads the uprising against the Etruscans.</li> <li>- Much of the plot concerns Brutus’s uprising against the Etruscans.</li> </ul>
Ovid	<i>Fasti</i> – (Ovid, 43 BC-AD 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Lucretia is passive</u> in this account. She does not demand vengeance, but Brutus leads an uprising on her behalf despite her reluctance to speak of her rape.</li> <li>- Much of the plot concerns Lucretia’s private shame.</li> </ul>
<i>Livy and Ovid both establish Tarquinius’s rape of Lucretia as a metaphor for the Etruscans’ figurative rape of Rome.</i>		
St Augustine	<i>The City of God</i> – circa 413	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Christianisation</u> of a pagan plot, in which Lucretia is <u>implied to be complicit</u> in her own rape. In theory, her complicity is demonstrated by the guilt she felt, that leads to her subsequent suicide.</li> <li>- Augustine employs this narrative to dissuade raped women from committing suicide.</li> </ul>
Chaucer	<i>Legend of Good Women</i> – 1386	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chaucer’s Lucretia swoons and faints as she is threatened by Tarquinius, <u>denying any possibility that she was complicit</u> in her own rape.</li> <li>- Chaucer’s <i>Lucretia</i> comes to represent the <u>shortcomings of the patriarchal system</u> that oppresses her, as they <u>‘forgive’ her for her rape</u>. This forgiveness implies they believe her to be guilty.</li> </ul>
Shakespeare	<i>The Rape of Lucrece</i> – 1594	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shakespeare establishes a metaphor in which Tarquin’s rape of Lucrece (and the subsequent uprising against the Etruscans) represents the potentially drastic consequences of not listening to ones’ counsel.</li> <li>- Therefore <u>‘Authorial will’ is problematised</u> – that is, Lucrece’s will is not respected by Tarquin.</li> <li>- <u>Ambiguity in conclusion</u> is realised, as Shakespeare’s account is not distinctly pagan or Christian despite employing features from both.</li> </ul>
Britten/ Duncan	<i>The Rape of Lucretia</i> – 1946	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Britten’s opera straddles most of the themes covered above.</li> <li>- Britten’s Male and Female Choruses both refer to the Etruscan’s unlawful rule of Rome, thus <u>reinstating Tarquinius’s rape of Lucretia as a metaphor</u>.</li> <li>- Britten adopted a <u>Christian narrative</u> to frame the pagan plot that was largely deplored by critics.</li> <li>- Lines remain within the opera <u>implying that Lucretia may have been complicit</u> in her own rape.</li> <li>- Collatinus <u>‘forgives’ Lucretia</u> for her rape by Tarquinius.</li> <li>- <u>Authorial will</u> is problematised as Tarquinius rapes Lucretia after she denies him twenty-six times.</li> <li>- <u>Authorial will</u> is also problematised before the premiere of the opera, when Britten and Duncan were required to re-draft sections of the opera that could have potentially destabilised the narrative they aimed to create.</li> </ul>

Table 1: Table outlining key features of the historical poems of *Lucretia*, with a comparison to features within Britten and Duncan’s opera.

## Setting the Scene: Livy and Ovid in Britten's *Lucretia*

In this section I will explore themes of gender and constructions of rape within Britten's opera, in relation to the poetry of Livy and Ovid. As such, this section largely corresponds to the first half of section 3, in which I discussed the legend of Lucretia according to Livy and Ovid, as well as exploring their wider output. I have identified several key sections within the opera, in order to explore the aforementioned themes. Whilst it might seem logical to discuss them in plot-chronological order, I have decided to pair certain movements together to contrast key features. The movements I have chosen are:

“Maria was unmasked at a masked ball” (Act I, Scene I) and “Their spinning wheel unwinds” (Act I, Scene II), to explore constructions of male and female gender roles respectively;

“My horse! My horse! – Interlude: Tarquinius does not wait” (Interlude of Act I) and “She sleeps as a rose upon the night” (Act II, Scene I), to assess Britten's use of animalistic and naturalistic imagery with regards to Tarquinius and Lucretia respectively; and,

The punctuated-chord rhythmic motif (featured throughout the opera) and specifically “Interlude: Here in this scene you see” (Interlude of Act II), to examine Britten's construction of rape narrative within the opera as a whole.

### Gender in Britten's *Lucretia*

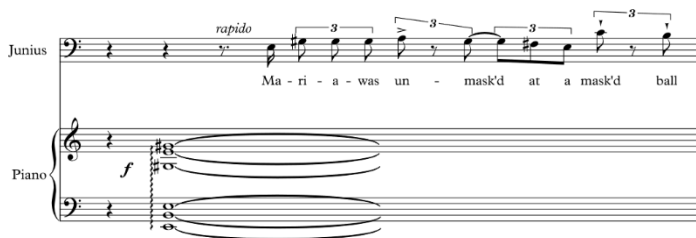
Situated within Act I, Scene I, “Maria was unmasked at a masked ball” depicts the conversation and argument of Collatinus, Tarquinius and Junius, as they compete over their partners' virtue, loyalty and chastity. The scene is situated within other male-only scenes, in which the atmosphere of the war-camp they inhabit is likened to a brewing thunderstorm, full of crickets and toads.<sup>158</sup>

Unlike the accounts of Livy and Ovid that I have previously discussed – in which the men argue about their wives' virtue, and then visit them to check – Britten

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<sup>158</sup> Howard, p. 31.

has the men discuss the virtue of their partners after they visited them unexpectedly the previous night. It is a movement explicit in its detail of men's honour, the means by which they demean one-another, and their regulation and re-distribution of power. As such each man characterises and embodies a different facet of public (dis)honour. Whilst Collatinus plays the role of a content husband whose wife Lucretia is known to be chaste, Tarquinius is the un-married, arrogant prince who comes to rape Lucretia, and Junius ('Brutus' in all former stories) is the idiotic brute who faces the humiliation of his partner's implied infidelity. The movement is split into three distinct sections, which I will refer to as the conversational recitative, the orchestral argument, and Junius's frenzy; each of these make use of contrasting orchestral palettes and thematic material to symbolise the competition of the men involved.



Example 1: The conversational recitative within "Maria was unmasked at a masked ball" (p. 26) – eight bars after figure 16.



Example 2: The marcato stabs accompanying Collatinus as he scolds Junius and Tarquinius within "Maria" (p. 27) – twenty-one bars after figure 16.

The opening of "Maria" begins with the conversational recitative and is leisurely in mood and pacing. As Tarquinius and Junius discuss their discovery of various disloyal women the previous night, they are accompanied only by the piano, which largely performs consonant spread-chords, as demonstrated in Example 1. As the conversational recitative progresses, Tarquinius declares Collatinus the winner of the competition, and begins to goad Junius – "And Junius is a cuckold". As Junius becomes frustrated, the accompanying chords become increasingly clustered and dissonant. At this point Collatinus interjects, asserting that the men should have never put their wives' chastity to the test (Example 2). Interestingly, in previous stories, it is Collatinus who instigates the test as he claims Lucretia's chastity, but we never see this scene in Britten's *Lucretia*. As Collatinus scolds them, he is accompanied by marcato stabs in the piano; however, as he offers a more consoling "I warned you not to go!", the piano resumes its gentler spread chords. Collatinus fails to console the men, and their argument escalates to new heights. Transitioning into the orchestral argument, the men insult one another – Junius: "Ram-reared!",

Tarquinius: “Wolf-weaned!” – and are accompanied by punctuated chords. The punctuated-chords theme is first performed at the very opening of the opera, establishing the key tonal centres of the first act. I will explore this theme in more depth later.



Example 3: The Lucretia motif (as highlighted in red) within “Maria” (p. 30) – from figure 18.

Following the punctuated chords, Collatinus further attempts to dissipate the men’s argument; however, Tarquinius turns on him and performs a mock-toast to Lucretia, utilising the Lucretia motif to highlight her chastity and loveliness (example 3).<sup>159</sup> Junius and Collatinus join the competition and the orchestral argument begins: turgid and heavy in style, the argument features the lower winds and (only down-bowed) strings, low tessituras, tenutos, and defiant fortissimo dynamics (Example 4).<sup>160</sup> The men compete over the melodic shape of the Lucretia motif; as they sing her name, their melody lines overlap, rise, fall, and occasionally augment in phrase length, until the orchestra subsides at the climax (marked by a fermata). Here, Tarquinius rises to a high-range F sharp, Collatinus rises to a mid-range C sharp and Junius subsides. A possible use of musical foreshadowing, it is Tarquinius that wins this competition, as he reaches the highest note at the climax of the Lucretia motif; Collatinus, on the other hand, demonstrates his naïve contentment in a note far more central in range, whilst Junius (a.k.a. ‘Brutus’), in lieu of his cowardly façade, gives up entirely, and stops singing.



Example 4: The orchestral argument within “Maria”, in which the Tarquinius, Junius and Collatinus compete over the Lucretia motif, culminating at the fermata of the last bar. (p. 31) – nine bars after figure 18.

<sup>159</sup> Seymour, p. 79.

<sup>160</sup> Howard, p. 35.

After Junius fails the competition, he is launched into a frenzy in which we see him explore several stages of obsession with Lucretia: obsession with her and her chastity – “Lucretia! I’m sick of that name!”; the importance of her (and other women’s) virtue over man’s reputation – “Her virtue is the measure of my shame”; and the humiliation and ridicule he will face because of his wife’s implied infidelity – “Now all of Rome will laugh at me” (Example 5). The Male Chorus briefly interjects, mocking Junius and singing of the ridicule he will face from his friends as they enjoy his public shame, and Junius resumes, singing of his jealousy of Collatinus’s public fame. Whilst Junius’s frenzy is accompanied by tremolo strings throughout, the most notable feature as that of the incessant woodwind flourishes that follow the shape of the Lucretia motif, as Junius is overwhelmed by his obsessive thoughts. As the movement concludes and Junius’s anger calms, the higher strings drop out, followed by the lower strings, Junius, and lastly the woodwind flourishes.

Example 5: Junius’s frenzy within “Maria”, in which the woodwind lines follow the melodic contour of the Lucretia motif (p. 32) – from figure 19.

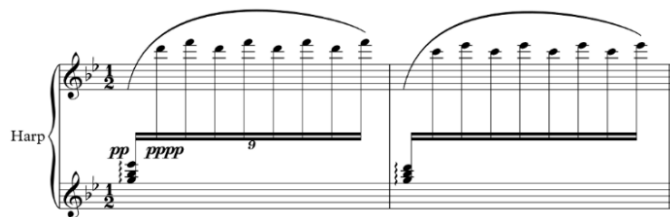
“Their spinning wheel unwinds”, Act I, Scene II, acts as a counterpart to *Maria* in its description of the female societal roles of Lucretia, Bianca and Lucia, whilst the Female Chorus offers a commentary. The scene depicts Lucretia, at home, spinning wool with her nurse Bianca, and maid Lucia, as they sing of their various desires; following in the tradition of Schubert’s *Gretchen am Spinnrade* (1814), a lied based on a text from Goethe’s *Faust* (1829) in which Gretchen sits at a spinning wheel singing of her desire for Faust, by whom she is ultimately deserted.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>161</sup> Schubert, “Op. 2 Gretchen Am Spinnrade”, in *Franz Schubert Lieder* (London: Bärenreiter-Verlag, 1814), pp. 14–23.





Example 6: The foot pedal (left hand) and perpetual motion of the spinning wheel (right hand) that permeate most of the musical score of Schubert's *Gretchen am Spinnrade*. (pp. 14-23)



Example 7: The foot pedal (left hand) and perpetual motion of the spinning wheel (right hand) that permeate most of the musical score of "Their spinning wheel unwinds" (p. 90) – opening of Scene II.

Utilising similar motivic devices, Britten's women are accompanied by harp, strings, woodwind and gong, and Schubert's just by piano. Firstly, Britten recreates Schubert's signification of the motion of the spinning wheel's foot pedal, substituting the piano's chords in the left hand for harp chords in the Female Chorus's sections, and accented string chords and gong for Lucretia, Bianca and Lucia's sections. Secondly, Britten recreates Schubert's signification of the perpetual motion of the wheel, substituting Schubert's right-hand, regular semiquavers (piano) for right-hand nonuplet quavers (harp) (Examples 6 and 7). As Schubert uses contrasting textures to conjure Gretchen's conception of grounded-reality and daydream-state, Britten builds upon these themes to incorporate further planes; "Spinning wheel" involves not only the three insiders – protagonist Lucretia (as the parallel to Gretchen), Bianca and Lucia – but also an outsider – the Female Chorus, who assumes the role of the narrator. Thus, the movement explores not only the planes of consciousness, but the interplay of the pagan and Christian narratives.

The movement is introduced by the Female Chorus, then sing Lucretia, Female Chorus, Bianca, Female Chorus, Lucia, Female Chorus, and finally, as the Female Chorus (the outsider) continues to sing, the three insiders begin once more, singing different lyrics. In the sections sung only by the Female Chorus, the foot-pedal motif and the perpetual-motion motif are played by the harp and singular woodwind lines. The singular woodwind lines are predominantly played by clarinet and oboe, and play in unison with the Female Chorus' melodies. They ascend largely in a crotchet scalic motion, representative of a line of thread, and are accompanied by the high tessitura of the harp. Transitioning from the Female Chorus into each insider section, the harp's perpetual-motion motif descends in range and the string accompaniment of the foot-pedal motif provides weighty, thick chords that ground us in the reality of the physical world. Transitioning into each outsider

section, the process reverses: the harp’s perpetual-motion motif ascends, the strings sustain chords which diminuendo, and the foot-pedal motif returns solely to the left hand of the harp.

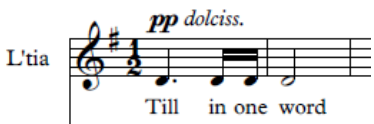

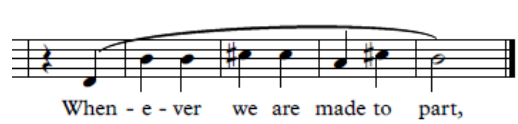
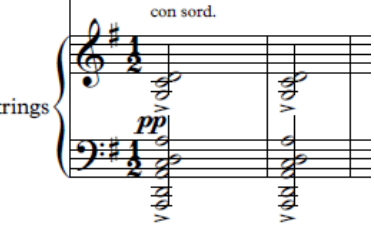
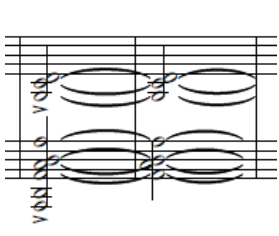

	<u>Grounded reality</u>	<u>Beginning to daydream</u>	<u>Established daydreaming</u>
L'tia	 <p><i>pp</i> <i>dolciss.</i> Till in one word</p>	 <p><i>pp</i> Col - la - ti - nus!</p>	 <p>When - e - ver we are made to part,</p>
Strings	 <p>con sord. <i>pp</i></p>		
	bb. 46-47	bb. 51-52	bb. 57-61

Table 2: States of consciousness within “Their spinning wheel unwinds” (pp. 92-93)

The first insider section is introduced by Lucretia, who – grounded in reality – sings firstly of spinning wool and then – as she begins to daydream – Collatinus: “Till in one word all is wound... Collatinus!”. As her daydream state is established she elaborates her love for Collatinus, which is arguably divided equally between virtue: “Whenever we are made to part, we live within each other’s heart”, and passion: “Both waiting, each wanting”. Her daydream state briefly returns to reality, before the insider section transitions back to the outsider commentary of the Female Chorus. Howard asserts that Bianca and Lucia respectively represent the virtue and passion of Lucretia; as such we see Bianca and Lucia’s sections follow suit.<sup>162</sup> Bianca sings firstly with reference to spinning wool and herself “Till like an old ewe... I’m shorn of beauty”, and then daydreams of her virtuous, quasi-maternal love of Lucretia: “Though I have never been a mother, Lucretia is my daughter, when dreaming”. Lucia sings firstly of her passionate longing for male companionship: “Till somebody loves her, from passion or pity”, and secondly, daydreams of her admiration for Lucretia and her chastity: “Meanwhile the chaste Lucretia gives life to her Lucia who lives”.

<sup>162</sup> Howard, p. 36.

As each insider progresses from grounded reality, begins to be, and then is established in daydream, the orchestra uses distinct textures and instrumentations to mirror these states of conscience, as demonstrated in Table 1. Peter Evans identifies the contrast in orchestrations: in the first sections, each singer is accompanied by thick, tonally ambiguous string chords which ground them in the reality of the foot-pedal, whilst the second sections – acting as transitions to the third – are characterised by sustained, bare string chords as the harp briefly rises and falls in range.<sup>163</sup> Once the daydream is established, the third section offers a typically romantic texture, in which the moving strings play richer harmonies. As the women sing of their love, desire and admiration, the harmonies become distinctly less bare and ambiguous, the textures becoming denser, richer, and representative of love.

Britten has “Spinning wheel” conclude similarly to the respective ending of Schubert’s *Gretchen* – that is to say, without conclusion. Gretchen leaves her expected phrase-length incomplete (Example 8), and all four of Britten’s women end the movement mid-phrase (Example 9). In “Spinning wheel”, the insiders finish abruptly through “With our hearts all –”, and the Female Chorus culminates during “Endless, so endless –”. Gretchen finishes singing after “Meine Ruh is thin, mein Herz ist schwer” (“My peace is gone, my heart is heavy”). Whilst Gretchen’s final phrase is not as abruptly interrupted as Britten’s women’s, both Schubert and Britten’s conclusions set up the expectation of the continuation of the musical phrase. Britten has his characters end in the thick, tonally ambiguous texture of the weighty strings previously associated with grounded reality; their phrases terminating without any cadence or sense of resolution, whilst Schubert crafts Gretchen’s final half-phrase in such a way that the listener expects a further four or five bars. The implication of the listener’s expectation for more music and the continuation of phrasing, therefore, is that the listener expects more of the same from each of the characters involved. As the act of spinning wool is a stereotypically domestic task (within the historical context of the Roman setting) that may be performed daily or weekly, we as listeners are led to expect that the women perform not only more spinning, but continue to long for men, virtue and passion on a routine basis.

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<sup>163</sup> Evans, p. 127.

Mei-ne Ruh - bei ihm, mein Herz - bei schwey.  
 Ich fin - de, Ich fin - de sie nim - mer und nim - mer nicht.

Example 8: The interrupted phrase ending (upper part, p. 23) compared to the expected phrase length (lower part, pp. 14-15) of Schubert's *Gretchen am Spinnrade*.

Lied-chen  
Bei  
Lied-chen  
With our hearts all  
end less, so end less.

Cl, in Bb  
Harp  
Reduced strings

Example 9: The interrupted phrase ending of "Spinning wheel" (p. 114) – at the end of the section, seven bars after figure 71.

When “Maria” and “Spinning wheel” are compared alongside one another, it becomes apparent that men are treated with distinct individuality of character, whilst women are portrayed as one homogenous body. Howard argues that men are typically characterised by arguments and drinking song, in which we see them instigate the chastity competition that later results in Lucretia’s rape; meanwhile the women are resolved to performing mundane domestic duties as they daydream.<sup>164</sup> This can be summarised: the men uphold the state, whilst the women uphold the home. As such, the men are characterised musically through individuality, with violent and dissonant outbursts, whilst the women’s thematic material centres on the predictable repetition of their chores. One might assume that Britten’s portrayal of the women is sexist as he contrasts brave, bold men against stereotypically subdued, house-bound women; however, when these characterisations are compared to the accounts I explored in the first half of section 3, Britten’s portrayals are arguably authentic insofar as he accurately reflects and respects his source texts. Arguably Britten has remained true to the intent of both Livy and Ovid in their depictions of Roman gender-norms, and as such these depictions may not necessarily represent the views of Britten himself.

Whilst Britten’s men and women contrast starkly in various ways, they are united in their admiration of Lucretia’s chastity. Whilst the men argue over Lucretia – Collatinus as the content husband, Junius as the jealous cuckold and Tarquinius as the arrogant aggressor – the women, too, obsess over Lucretia’s chastity. Bianca represents Lucretia’s virtue, and as such longs for passion as she reflects on her life without children, and meanwhile, Lucia is inferred to represent Lucretia’s passion, and as such longs for a husband. Harper-Scott argues that Lucretia’s suicide ultimately upholds the patriarchal values that caused her rape in the first place.<sup>165</sup> However, in Britten’s opera we see both men and women participate in the longing for various features of chastity: Collatinus is satisfied with and boastful of his wife’s public chastity, Junius is jealous of Collatinus’s reputation, Tarquinius wishes to defile both Lucretia’s chastity and Collatinus’s reputation, Bianca aspires to Lucretia’s passion, and Lucia aspires to Lucretia’s virtue (both of these being aspects of Lucretia’s chastity).

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<sup>164</sup> Howard, p. 35.

<sup>165</sup> Harper-Scott, “Post-War Women”, p. 99.

Despite this unity in admiration of Lucretia's chastity, it is still the men who hold the power to inflict change. Lucretia's chastity is appropriated by the men as social currency in their competition for superiority; whilst Collatinus elevates his superiority above Tarquinius the prince, Tarquinius is resolved to rectify this assertion by proving Lucretia unchaste. My recognition of metaphorical foreshadowing in the pitch-content of the men's orchestral argument in Example 4 holds a distinct irony: whilst Collatinus is content in his wife's chastity, he ultimately loses his wife; whilst Tarquinius succeeds in winning the competition and raping Lucretia, he ultimately loses his kingdom; and whilst Junius loses the competition due to his cowardly nature, he ultimately instigates the revolution, thus defeating Tarquinius and his family.

### Tarquinius and Lucretia in Britten's *Lucretia*

"My horse! My horse! – Interlude: Tarquinius does not wait", appears in Act I, and depicts Tarquinius' horse ride to Collatinus' house, where Lucretia is spinning wool with Bianca and Lucia. Howard asserts that it is an almost heroic interlude; sung only by the Male Chorus, of Tarquinius, it evokes equine imagery of persistent animalistic sexual virility, and Tarquinius' arrival and crossing of the River Tiber.<sup>166</sup> The structure of the movement follows two contrasting halves which I will refer to as the horse section (bb. 1–180) and the River Tiber section (bb. 181–220). Following in the tradition of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Britten conjures animalistic and naturalistic imagery, utilising orchestral effects and motivic devices, in conjunction with the Male Chorus's melodic line and lyrics, to create a transformation in which Tarquinius is likened increasingly to the horse he rides. When referring to musical examples, I will reference Table 3 in which I have collated my ideas.

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<sup>166</sup> Howard, p. 37.

**“My horse! My horse! Interlude: Tarquinius does not wait”**












<b><u>Metre and Rhythm</u></b>	$\frac{1}{4}$ - Regular semiquaver feel	$\frac{1}{4}$ - Triplet quaver feel	$\frac{1}{4}$ - Regular quaver feel	$\frac{1}{4}$ - Crotchet feel
<b><u>Bar numbers</u></b>	<i>bb. 1 – 27</i>	<i>bb. 28 – 59</i>	<i>bb. 60 – 102</i>	<i>bb. 103 – 158</i>
<b><u>Key</u></b>	Eb Major	G Major	C major	Eb Major
<b><u>Example of reduced accomp' (strings and woodwind)</u></b>	 <p align="center"><i>bb. 1 - 3</i></p>	 <p align="center"><i>bb. 28 - 30</i></p>	 <p align="center"><i>bb. 60 - 62</i></p>	 <p align="center"><i>bb. 103 - 105</i></p>
<b><u>Flute and Male Chorus interaction</u></b>	 <p align="center"><i>bb. 14 - 16</i></p>	 <p align="center"><i>bb. 32 - 34</i></p>	 <p align="center"><i>bb. 61 - 66</i></p>	 <p align="center"><i>bb. 103 - 108</i></p>
<b><u>Three-bar propulsion motif (strings and woodwind)</u></b>	 <p align="center"><i>bb. 25 - 27</i></p>	 <p align="center"><i>bb. 57 - 59</i></p>	 <p align="center"><i>b. 102</i></p>	N/A

Table 3: Collection of musical examples regarding “My horse! My horse! Interlude: Tarquinius does not wait”. (pp.71-86)

The horse section itself contains two sections depicting the increasing (bb. 1–158) and decreasing speed of the horse (bb. 159–180), in which Britten makes use of different metres and rhythms to portray the variations in speed. Beginning in E-flat major, in 1/4 metre (bb. 1–27) with semiquavers, the horse’s four-beat steady walk is accompanied by grace-note flourishes in the flute representative of whinnying, and is propelled into the next section by a three-bar crescendo and chromatic rise into the new implied speed; the same 1/4 metre but in a triplet-quaver (3/8) feel. This section (bb. 28-59) is established in G major, and now features high, piercing tonguing in the flute; Britten’s word painting of leaping grace-notes is characteristic of the Male Chorus’ “Clicks his tongue, flicks his whip”. The (3/8) section propels into the next section with another three-bar crescendo, this time the F-sharp (serving as a leading note to G) and G (as the dominant of C) driving the music into the new key of C major, with the same 1/4 metre with a regular-quaver pulse. This new metre and pulse marks the new speed (bb. 60–102), with the flute playing high sustained trills. The three-bar propulsion motif is condensed into one bar of 3/8 metre, with a dramatic crescendo as the flute plays a B major scale (starting on an F-sharp) into the final speed – the same 1/4 metre, now played with a crotchet feel; the harmony returning to E-flat major, and the flute accompanying this speed (bb. 103–158) with double-tongued scalic runs. As Tarquinius arrives at the River Tiber, these speeds are then reversed (bb. 159–180) as the horse slows, declining from the 1/4 crotchet feel, to the regular-quaver feel, triplet-quaver (3/8) feel, and back to the steady, slow walk of the semiquaver rhythm of the first speed.

Evoking an Ovidian metamorphosis – similar to those metamorphoses of male rapists I discussed in section 3 – Britten’s use of varied rhythmic pacing (semiquavers, to triplet-quavers etc.) in combination with the flute’s piercing flourishes encourages an association between Tarquinius and the horse. As the horse theme progresses, the melody line of the Male Chorus increasingly merges with the flute’s melody line (demonstrated by ‘flute and tenor interaction’ in Table 3), until they play and sing in near-unison. The Male Chorus’ lyrics simultaneously undergo a similar transformation, in which Tarquinius and the horse are first described as separate entities – “Tarquinius does not wait for his servant to wake, or his groom to saddle; He snatches a bridle, and forcing the iron bit through the beast’s bared white teeth” – and by the end, as one combined entity – “Now who



rides? Who's ridden? Tarquinius, the stallion? Or the beast, Tarquinius?". Fragments of the contrasting rhythmic sections are heard later in the opera, at the end of "Ah... Time treads on the hands of women" (Act I, Scene II) and the beginning of "The oatmeal slippers of sleep" (Act I, Scene II). Both of these scenes are from the perspective of the three female insiders; a use of dramatic irony in which the audiences anticipate the arrival of Tarquinius upon the horse, unbeknownst to the women.

The horse section is then followed by the River Tiber section, which uses one constant pulse, the same 1/4 metre played with quintuplet semiquavers. This section (bb. 181–220) utilises motivic material previously used once before in the opera in "Collatinus is politically astute" (Act I, Scene I), in which the Male Chorus talks of Junius' obsessive jealousy. However, this first reiteration of the River Tiber section in "My horse!" has the Male Chorus discuss the unity of Tarquinius and his horse as they conquer and cross the river. As the horse approaches and crosses the River Tiber, the quintuplet rippling-motif, initially played only by the flute, incorporates more instruments; the viola, followed by Violin I, the clarinet, and so on. Eventually the entire ensemble plays, creating an atmosphere in which the Male Chorus is surrounded and encompassed by the orchestra.

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Flute, Clarinet in Bb, Violin II, and Viola. The music is in 4/4 time and features a quintuplet of semiquavers. The Flute part is at the top, followed by Clarinet in Bb, Violin II, and Viola at the bottom. Red markings highlight the melodic contour of the Lucretia motif in the Flute part and its presence in the other instruments.

*Example 10:* A segment of the River Tiber section, in which the melodic contour of the Lucretia motif (in red) is always at the foreground of the orchestra's material (pp. 87–88)– thirteen bars after figure 54.

The concept of depth is explored on two planes; firstly, the physical depth of the water, represented by the expansion of the orchestral palette; and secondly, Tarquinius' obsession with and desire for Lucretia, represented by the contour of the highest melodic instrument (almost always the flute, but occasionally the clarinet) as it follows the shape of the Lucretia motif (Example 10). Whilst the accompanying instruments follow different contours, blurring the harmonic material and representing the rippling water, the Lucretia motif is always at the forefront; simultaneously the

surface of the mind, and metaphorically the surface of the water. Finally, as the orchestra comes to an abrupt halt (b. 220), the Male Chorus laments 'Lucretia!' on an augmented Lucretia motif, confirming the desire of Tarquinius and appropriating it as a melancholic, desperate cry.

The second reiteration of the River Tiber section is a cappella, and appears in "See how the rampant centaur mounts the sky" within the movement "Lucretia... what do you want?" (Act II, Scene I), the final movement before Lucretia's fate is realised. Alluding once more to an Ovidian metamorphoses, Britten's Tarquinius has now achieved full transfiguration as he is compared to a centaur; half-man, half-horse, after the previous iteration within "My horse! Interlude: Tarquinius does not wait" sees the Male Chorus attempt to unite the two separate entities. As Lucretia describes the event, post-rape, we are once again reminded of the centaur-animalistic imagery, as the thematic material of rippling quintuplet semiquavers returns for the last time.

"She sleeps as a rose upon the night" appears in Act II, Scene I, and as a counterpart to "My horse!", has the Female Chorus sing of Lucretia. It is a short section that utilises a reduced accompaniment of alto flute, bass clarinet, horn and harp. The horn is muted, and the harp plays octave harmonics in near-unison with the Female Chorus; thus, each instrument provides a characteristically hollow sound to conjure the mysterious, dark night. Britten's use of alto flute and bass clarinet became a favoured combination featured in later operas *Albert Herring* (1947), *Gloriana* (1953) and *The Turn of the Screw* (1954), all depicting night-time scenes.<sup>167</sup> Whilst Tarquinius is? being described firstly as riding the horse, and then as being the horse, Lucretia is described firstly as sleeping in the night, and then as the night. In this movement the Female Chorus's lyrics do not specifically distinguish Lucretia as the night as explicitly as the Male Chorus distinguishes Tarquinius as the horse. However, the explication becomes apparent when the movements are compared as the Chorus's descriptive accounts of the protagonists, in relation to the naturalistic and animalistic imagery of Ovid. All specific musical references regarding *She sleeps* can be found within Example 11.

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<sup>167</sup> Howard, p. 37.

The image shows a musical score for the opening of "She sleeps as a rose upon the night" (p. 181). It consists of four staves. The top staff is for A. Fl. in G. The second staff is for Hn. (ppp). The third staff is for B. Cl. in Bb. The bottom staff is for F. C. (pp dolciss.). The lyrics "She sleeps as a rose upon the night" are written below the F. C. staff.

*Example 11:* The opening of “She sleeps as a rose upon the night” (p. 181), in which the harp – in unison with the Female Chorus – penetrates the timbre of the comparatively hollow-sounding accompanying instruments.

In addition to a delicate, hollow orchestration, Britten utilises a constant 3/4 metre. Harmonic progress is limited predominantly to C major with brief excursions to A major, and a section established largely in whole-tone scales has the Female Chorus sing of the dreaming Lucretia. The superficial simplicity of Britten’s composition, however, does not follow in the narrative of “Spinning wheel” in its portrayal of mundane, homely duties. Rather, it depicts the beauty, purity, and chastity of the innocent Lucretia, whom the Female Chorus likens to roses and lilies, in her most vulnerable state of sleep. Despite the movement’s modest simplicity, it is imbued with subtle complexities.

In “Britten’s Opera About Rape”, Harper-Scott identifies the Female Chorus’s B-natural tonal centre in “She sleeps” as an aberration against its pure key of C major. Coining the B-natural as Lucretia’s ‘leading-on note’, the note later comes to represent Tarquinius’s desire for Lucretia, created by her chastity and beauty.<sup>168</sup> Expanding his argument in “Post-War Women in Britten”, Harper-Scott utilises the psycho-analytical theory of Lacan. The B-natural becomes Lucretia’s *objet a*, a paradoxical object of desire that in itself creates more desire, but cannot be quenched due to its regeneration of more desire.<sup>169</sup> Thus, Tarquinius’s desire to rape Lucretia (or even his desire for consensual sex) would only lead to more desire for more sexual defeat; consensual or not. Harper-Scott’s identification of the B-natural’s staining quality enhances the interest of Britten’s use of the mysterious night to represent Lucretia.

<sup>168</sup> Harper-Scott, "Opera about Rape", p. 81.

<sup>169</sup> Harper-Scott, "Post-War Women", p. 89.

Evans, similarly to Howard, identifies Britten's use (and later use) of alto flute and bass clarinet as a favoured combination, but also specifically notes the luminous quality of the harp's octave harmonics.<sup>170</sup> Whilst the B-natural is identified to represent Tarquinius's desire to (literally) penetrate Lucretia, we see Lucretia identified by a scene in which the harp's harmonics timbrally penetrate the hollow woodwind tone, and metaphorically penetrate the dark night sky with starlight. Therefore, as a parallel to "My horse!", in which Tarquinius is described in his conquering, relentless and unstoppable sexual potency, "She sleeps" foreshadows Lucretia's penetration/rape as a self-fulfilling prophecy. The movement suggests that Lucretia's fate lies not only in Tarquinius's unstoppable desire, but in her very being, as described by B-natural-centric melodic content of the Female Chorus as she sings in unison with the harp. Thus, a similar internal blame to that I explored in section 3 is employed, in which Lucretia's rape is accredited to the desire her own chastity and beauty created. The suggestion of Lucretia's internal blame as a self-fulfilling prophecy, represented by penetrative starlight is confirmed when Tarquinius rapes her later that night.

When "My horse!" and "She sleeps" are compared alongside one another, the gendered attitudes imposed upon both Tarquinius and Lucretia become apparent; both musical sections include an aspect of animalism or nature, and both characters are provided with a justification for Lucretia's rape, by virtue of both their being. Lucretia's internal blame acts as a justification of her own rape; perhaps more concerning is Britten's possible justification of Tarquinius's rape of Lucretia. In portraying Tarquinius as an unstoppable and relentless horse, Britten implies that Tarquinius, like an animal, is void of inhibitions. On a purely factual basis, Tarquinius is a human man perfectly capable of controlling his sexual desires. As a parallel to Lucretia, where Lucretia's rape is instilled within her, Tarquinius's predatory nature is implied to be instilled within him. The difference however lies in the intent of each character: Lucretia does not desire to be raped, and as such has no control over the blame instilled within her, whereas Tarquinius does intend to rape Lucretia, therefore compromising his human inhibitions. By portraying Tarquinius as an animal void of inhibitions, Britten essentially excuses Tarquinius's actions, as suggested by the

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<sup>170</sup> Evans, p. 126.

implication that he could not have possibly resisted his factually-human inhibitions, instincts and desires.

This assertion that Tarquinius is unable to stop his equine-animalistic virility is given further weight when he is later compared to a centaur in “See how the rampant centaur mounts the sky” within the movement “Lucretia... what do you want?” (Act II, Scene I). Weinstock argues that in mythology, centaurs typically represent the divided nature of man. Whilst they consist of half-human and half-horse, their human capacity for intelligence is compromised by their animalistic instincts and lack of inhibition.<sup>171</sup> Seymour raises concern, arguing that Duncan himself may have related to Tarquinius, recounting one of Duncan’s anecdotes in which he admitted stalking through a house to gaze at a sleeping woman.<sup>172</sup> Significantly, it was also on this occasion that, whilst gazing upon the sleeping woman, Duncan wrote the text for “She sleeps”.<sup>173</sup>

### Rape in Britten’s *Lucretia*

As I have discussed in section 3, the rape of Lucretia (and other legends that employ rape narratives) often refers to a wider, external narrative beyond the immediate plot. Both Livy and Ovid’s accounts are bookended by the unlawful sack of Rome and the banishment of the Etruscan family, which reinstate the rape of Lucretia as a metaphor once her unlawful rape is resolved through suicide. Britten adopts a similar strategy throughout his opera by utilising a particular rhythmic motif, which I have referred to previously in this section as ‘punctuated chords’, when discussing the scene “Maria was unmasked at a masked ball”.

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<sup>171</sup> ‘Centaur’, Richard Ellis, in *The Ashgate Encyclopedia of Literary and Cinematic Monsters*, ed. by Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 75–77 (p. 75).

<sup>172</sup> Seymour, p. 82.

<sup>173</sup> Duncan, p. 71.

**Allegro con fuoco** ♩ = 80

*ff*

Example 12: The punctuated-chords rhythmic-motif within “Rome is now ruled by the Etruscan upstart” (p. 1) – heard at the very opening of the opera.

The opera opens in the key of C minor, as the entire orchestra homophonically asserts the first occurrence of the punctuated-chord rhythmic-motif (Example 12). The Male Chorus is the first character to sing in this scene. Exasperated, his recitative discusses the wrong-doings of the Etruscan king; his division of the Roman court, those he murdered, his bribery, his rule of Rome by force etc. The Male Chorus is frequently interrupted by the orchestra’s punctuated chords, that sketch out the key tonal areas of the opera.<sup>174</sup>

Tarquinius  
Rat! You old man! Pa-gan - dy spep - tic pig! Wolf - weaned!

Junius  
You young sot! Lewd li-cen - tious lout! Ram - reared!

Piano  
*fff*

Example 13: The first reiteration of the punctuated-chords rhythmic-motif within “Maria” (p. 29) – five bars after figure 17.

<sup>174</sup> Brett, p. 56.

The first reiteration of the punctuated-chord rhythmic-motif comes in “Maria was unmasked at a masked ball” (Example 13). Whilst the rhythm of the punctuated chords is slightly different, its disjointed syncopation creates the same stomach-turning, lurching effect. I have discussed this section earlier, however only in relation to the nature of the men’s conversational tone. Whilst the men did indeed transition from conversation, to argument, to Junius’s monological frenzy, I did not discuss the context of the punctuated chords within this scene. The orchestra plays homophonic punctuated chords, much alike the opening of the opera, and their placement here coincides with Junius’s and Tarquinius’s insults concerning their cultural backgrounds. Whilst Junius alludes to Tarquinius’s promiscuity and reckless spending – “Spendthrift! Lecher! Climber! Rake!... You young sot! Lewd licentious lout! Ram-reared!”, Tarquinius’s retorts are comparatively childish – “Usurer! Eunuch! Upstart! Rat! You old man! Pagan dyspeptic pig!” The orchestra dramatically halts, as if stunned, by Tarquinius’s final insult – “Wolf-weaned!”, an allusion to the founding of Rome by Romulus and Remus, who were found with a wolf as babies (as I discussed in section 3). Here an association between the Etruscans’ rape of Rome (from the opening), Tarquinius’s blatant disrespect of Rome (as proven by “Wolf-weaned!”) and the punctuated-chords rhythmic-motif is now established.

*Example 14:* The second reiteration of the punctuated-chords rhythmic-motif within “The prosperity of the Etruscans was due” (p. 158)– at the opening of Act II.

In later reiterations of the punctuated-chord rhythmic-motif, the rhythms of such punctuated chords are further complicated; however, each reiteration employs a complexity of rhythm that is frenetic, unpredictable and irregular. The second reiteration appears in the opening of Act II, and is united with text regarding the Etruscan’s unfair and disrespectful treatment of the defeated Romans (Example 14). This text is initially sung by the Female Chorus, then follows the Male Chorus, and

then Lucia, Bianca, Junius and Collatinus continue to sing offstage – “Rome’s for the Romans!... Down with the Etruscans!”

*Example 15:* The third and final reiteration of the punctuated-chords rhythmic-motif within “Interlude: Here in this scene you see” (p. 227) – twelve bars before figure 46 (including dashed bar-lines).

The third and final reiteration of the punctuated-chord rhythmic-motif is presented in the second interlude of the opera – “Interlude: Here in this scene you see” – at which point Britten depicts Lucretia’s rape. Like Livy and Ovid in their accounts of *Lucretia*, Britten does not explore the act of rape with any anatomical detail. Whilst Livy and Ovid reduce the rape to a mere one line each, in which no description is provided as to the physicality of the act, Britten reduces the rape to an interlude in which Tarquinius and Lucretia cannot be seen. Instead, audiences are encouraged to perceive the rape through entirely musical means; they are presented with a scene in which the Male and Female Choruses sing a simple set of chorale variations on a hymn to the virgin Mary, whilst the orchestra performs a frantic and hysterical canonic accompaniment.<sup>175</sup>

Seymour argues that within *Lucretia*, Britten uses sharp keys to identify women (C-sharp minor, E, G, B), and flat keys to identify men (C minor, E-flat, G minor, B-flat).<sup>176</sup> In addition, Evans argues that the Lucretia motif establishes a connection between Lucretia (and the other female characters) and minor thirds, whilst men are frequently characterised through descending scales.<sup>177</sup> As such, an observation of the first two pages of the second interlude sees the tonality constantly shift; whilst the orchestra alternates between flat bars and sharp bars, the two singers alternate every three bars whilst their melody lines follow angular, minor thirds (Example 16). This co-mingling of tonalities, with respect to their connotations of men and women, demonstrates a co-mingling similar to that of Alpheus’ rape of

<sup>175</sup> Howard, p. 39.

<sup>176</sup> Seymour, p. 79.

<sup>177</sup> Evans, p. 132.



Arethusa. Whilst the theme of co-mingling continues throughout the interlude, a similar use of rhythmic pacing previously used in “My horse!” is employed; however, the effect is significantly different. Whilst “My horse!” sees the rhythm change gradually from short note-values (semiquavers) to long note-values (crotchets) to portray the horse’s increasing speed, the same use of short note-values (quavers) to long note-values (minims and semibreves) occurs and is subverted in “Here in this scene” to depict a sense of decreasing speed.

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Woodwind, F.C. M.C. (Female and Male Chorus), and Strings. The score is in 8/8 time and marked 'Presto' with a tempo of 76. The lyrics are: 'Here in this scene you see' and 'Vir - tue as - sailed by sin'. The score includes a section starting at bar 7. The Woodwind part features complex rhythmic patterns with many beamed notes. The F.C. M.C. part has long note values, and the Strings part provides a harmonic accompaniment.

Example 16: A segment from “Interlude: Here in this scene you see” (p. 225) – ten bars after figure 43 (including dashed bar-lines).

Whilst audiences are provided with no visual detail of the scene, the slowing down of rhythmic pacing may lend numerous aural implications; firstly, that Lucretia, under the threat of Tarquinius, begins to submit to sex without physical fight; secondly, that Tarquinius, having raped Lucretia, has started to lose his sense of sexual desire; or thirdly, that the ominous, bare, and ambiguous harmonies that accompany the longer note-values could imply Tarquinius’s immediate sense of regret. Any number of implications may be established, Howard arguing simply that the augmentation of rhythms depicts the scene moving away from the act of rape.<sup>178</sup> By comparing the use of rhythmic pacing employed in both interludes – in which the first interlude describes Tarquinius’s sexual potency with equine imagery, and the

<sup>178</sup> Howard, p. 39.

second, the act of his rape – we are encouraged to unite the scenes; thus, we see an Ovidian use of animalistic imagery (“My horse!”) at its most devastating when acted upon (“Here in this scene”).

Ultimately, on a large-scale basis, the significance of the punctuated chords can be united with the Livian and Ovidian approaches of narrative framework; where Lucretia’s rape is bookended by events beyond the act itself (the unlawful sack of Rome, and its subsequent uprising) in these historical poems, Britten too employs a musical expression of this strategy in which the punctuated-chords rhythmic-motif associated with the act of Lucretia’s rape is further utilised as a framework for the entire opera. Like Livy and Ovid, Britten reinstates Lucretia as a metaphor for the unlawful destruction of a civilisation, and as such, the rape of Lucretia arguably becomes secondary to the metaphor it comes to represent. Perhaps then, it may be appropriate to re-name the ‘punctuated-chords rhythmic-motif’ to the ‘rape-metaphor-motif’.

## Christianity, Complicity, and Ambiguity in Conclusion: Augustine, Chaucer, and Shakespeare in Britten's *Lucretia*

Much criticism of Britten's *Lucretia* surrounded the themes of Christianisation, implied-complicity, and ambiguity in conclusion that arose from the libretto. In this section I will explore these themes within Britten's opera, in relation to the historical poems of Augustine, Chaucer and Shakespeare I discussed in the second half of section 3. Unlike the first part of section 4, in which I largely assessed the musical construction of the respective themes of gender and rape, in this section I predominantly explore themes of Christianity, complicity and ambiguity in the narrative of the opera's plot, with regard to the literary process of the opera. I will be considering the following scenes musically:

Specifically, "Epilogue: Is it all?" (Final scene of Act II) and more generally, themes of Christianity throughout the opera.

However, much of this section will concern the opera's libretto, regarding sections such as:

"Flowers bring to every year" (Act II, Scene II) and "Last night Tarquinius ravished me", in which Britten and Duncan adopt the use of internal and external blame, and implied-complicity.

I will then compare these themes of Christianity and complicity, to assess the unresolved nature of Britten and Duncan's *Lucretia*.

### Christianity

Whilst Britten's opera concerns the pagan plot of the Roman Lucretia, who is raped and commits suicide to set an example to other Roman women not to use her name as an excuse for adultery, a Christian framework was also adopted at Britten's request.<sup>179</sup> The Male and Female Choruses have the monumental task of commentating on the respective Roman and Christian histories beyond the historical placement of the legend, whilst also narrating the central pagan plot itself. Dissimilar

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<sup>179</sup> Mitchell, Reed, and Cooke, III, p. 179.

to the previous historical accounts of Lucretia according to Livy and Ovid, Britten’s narrative does not give substantial weight to Junius’s overthrow of the Etruscan monarchy after Lucretia’s suicide.<sup>180</sup>

The image shows a musical score for Example 17, featuring vocal and instrumental parts. The vocal parts are for Female Chorus and Male Chorus, with lyrics: "Whilst we as two ob-ser-vers stand be-tween This pre-sent au-dience and that scene We'll view these hu-man pas-sions and these years Through eyes which once have wept with Christ's own tears!". The instrumental parts include Wind and Double bass (8vb). The score is marked "Solenne" with a tempo of quarter note = 44. Dynamics include *ppp*, *meno p*, *piu f*, *cresc. e marcato*, *f*, *dim.*, *f dim.*, and *ppp >*.

Example 17: The paralysing nature of the orchestra’s unison Gs within “It is an axiom among kings” (pp. 11–13) – beginning at figure 7.

Both the Male and Female Choruses open the opera as they describe the unlawful sack of Rome and the poor treatment of the Roman people; after which, both appear to ascend beyond the Roman setting to describe their function as Christian narrators (Example 17). Britten utilises octave unison Gs throughout the entire ensemble, paralysing the two commentators as they transcend the pagan time and setting. This theme later reappears in the opening of Act II in a similar manner: After the Female and Male Chorus once again describe the maltreatment of Roman people, they once again ascend beyond the Roman setting. Accompanied now by octave unison Es throughout the ensemble, they sing the same text as earlier: ‘Whilst we as two observers stand between, This present audience and that scene, We’ll view these human passions and these years, Through eyes which once have wept with Christ’s own tears.’

These are the only two iterations of Christian narrative that involve a sense of ascension created by octave unison notes; in addition, Britten employs further implications of Christianity throughout the opera. In the scenes “Maria was unmasked at a masked ball” and “Their spinning wheel unwinds”, Britten reserves a sparsity of orchestration for segments in which only the Male and Female Choruses

<sup>180</sup> Brett, p. 61.

sing as narrators; meanwhile the internal Roman characters are accompanied by a denser orchestral palette with wider sonorities. The next overtly Christian feature appears in “Interlude II: Here in this scene you see”, depicting Tarquinius’s rape of Lucretia. As the orchestra performs a frantic canon, the Choruses can be heard singing a hymn to the virgin Mary, a parallel to the chaste Lucretia. The last explicitly Christian narration appears in the epilogue of the opera, as the Male Chorus describes Christ upon the cross, whereupon a parallel is drawn between Christ and Lucretia, both of whom appear to die for people’s sins. Here the suspended dominant G pedal from the opening resolves to the tonic C to provide a sense of resolution.<sup>181</sup>

### Complicity and Blame

In the tradition of Augustine, Duncan’s initial drafts of the libretto implied that Lucretia may have been complicit in her own rape. The score and libretto were submitted for review to the Lord Chamberlain, an office founded in 1737 dedicated to the assessment for plays, operas and theatre productions. Originally founded to censor productions in an attempt to regulate obscenity in public theatre, the Lord Chamberlain’s Readers of Plays would also frequently censor features such as homosexuality and political slander, and – one may assume – sexual assault and rape.<sup>182</sup> However, I have not found any instances of plays and/or operas censored for similar features of rape or sexual assault around the time Britten and Duncan were creating their opera. After their score and libretto were submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for review, Britten and Duncan were forced to change lines that implied Lucretia’s complicity; Duncan re-wrote the text to one such segment that now exists as the second interlude, “Here in this scene you see”, in which the lines of complicity have been removed, and the Male and Female Choruses now sing a hymn to the virgin Mary. However, as I will discuss, many scholars believe that implications of complicity still exist within the text.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Seymour, p. 89.

<sup>182</sup> Dominic Shellard, Steve Nicholson, and Miriam Handley, *The Lord Chamberlain Regrets... A History of British Theatre Censorship* (London: The British Library, 2004), pp. 5, 15.

<sup>183</sup> Kildea, pp. 269–72.

Seymour argues similarly to Kildea, that Lucretia believes in her own culpability, made apparent in the following text of “Flowers bring to every year”:

*Women bring to every man  
the same defection;  
Even their love’s debauched  
By vanity or flattery  
Flowers alone are chaste.  
Let their pureness show my grief  
To hide my shame  
And be my wreath!*<sup>184</sup>

Seymour’s argument regarding this text follows in a similar vein to my earlier argument regarding section 3, whereupon I discussed the way in which raped women frequently curse their own beauty as an instigator of their fate. Seymour argues that Duncan was eager to foreground Lucretia’s possible complicity and internal guilt; however, I propose that Britten’s orchestration of “She sleeps” unites both Lucretia’s beauty, and the self-fulfilling quality of penetration that she later comes to endure.<sup>185</sup> Referring to Act II, Scene II, Brett argues similarly of Lucretia’s internal blame: Lucretia internalises her oppression in a similar manner to modern-day raped women, whereby she dramatizes her shame and guilt despite her total and unequivocal innocence.<sup>186</sup> Thus, we see Tarquinius make his own desire Lucretia’s crime; Lucretia is made to feel inherent guilt for her perfectly natural human sexual desire, despite the possibility she did not feel this desire in the first place.<sup>187</sup>

Many scholars have attempted to realise the implications of Lucretia’s implied-complicity. Evans provides the same verse as Seymour in order to argue that Lucretia may have felt sexual attraction towards Tarquinius; however, he develops his argument further. Lucretia may not have felt any sexual attraction to Tarquinius prior to her rape; however, her suicide could have been justified in her realisation of

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<sup>184</sup> Britten, pp. 274–75.

<sup>185</sup> Seymour, pp. 83–85.

<sup>186</sup> Brett, p. 68.

<sup>187</sup> Brett, pp. 68–69.

the unity of two factors – firstly, her disgust at Tarquinius’s assault; and secondly, her horrific attraction to the realisation of nightmare.<sup>188</sup> Harper-Scott, however, vehemently opposes the possibility of Lucretia’s complicity. Arguing that Lucretia exclaims a variant of ‘No!’ a total of twenty-six times in attempting to dissuade Tarquinius (in “Lucretia... What do you want?” of Act II, Scene I), Harper-Scott appears to overlook the possibility of pre-existing complicity narratives.<sup>189</sup> Whilst one can agree that the implication of a raped woman’s complicity is a grotesque concept, it is an established tradition of Christianised legends of Lucretia nonetheless. Harper-Scott appears to have alienated not only the Christianised legends that imply complicity, but the aforementioned scholarship that identifies lines of implied-complicity still present in the opera.

Certain lines that implied complicity were removed, and some remained; had all of these lines remained, the narrative may have imitated more closely that of Augustine’s, insofar as a plot is devised in which the pagan Lucretia’s virtue is subverted through Christianisation. Britten’s Lucretia, like Augustine’s, would have presented the public with a predicament in which Lucretia is unjust, either for being adulterous (implied by the offending lines), or for self-inflicted murder. Kildea further notes that Kathleen Ferrier (who sung the title role of Lucretia) was disappointed by the implication of Lucretia’s complicity, believing that this implication ultimately destroyed her virtuous status as an exemplum.<sup>190</sup> However, in Augustine’s narrative this is exactly the point. Augustine believes that an honourable Christian should condemn both adultery and suicide/self-murder, and as such, is against the Roman values that forefront Lucretia’s public honour despite her known innocence. If Britten and Duncan were able to offer a narrative in which *Lucretia* was wholly Christianised, by virtue of the full implication of her complicity, the external narrative metaphor offered would have likely been more cohesive.

In addition to the Augustinian tradition of internal blame by implied-complicity, Britten and Duncan employ the concept of external blame posed by Chaucer, as Collatinus forgives Lucretia in “Last night Tarquinius ravished me”:

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<sup>188</sup> Evans, p. 142.

<sup>189</sup> Harper-Scott, "Post-War Women", p. 97.

<sup>190</sup> Kildea, p. 270.

*What Tarquinius has taken*

*Can be forgotten.*

*What Lucretia has been forgiven*

*Can be forgiven.*<sup>191</sup>

The crux of forgiveness lies in the hypothetical fault of Lucretia; in Chaucer's account, whilst Lucrece may be confident in her own innocence, her fate ultimately lies in the hands of the Roman patriarchal order that instigated her rape in the first place. That is to say, if her own husband feels compelled to forgive her for a crime she did not commit – to imply she was in some way culpable – the public are likely to react similarly too. Seymour therefore argues that in forgiving Lucretia, Collatinus confirms his distrust of Lucretia's innocence, simultaneously and consequently necessitating her death.<sup>192</sup> Evans believes Collatinus is not the only instigator of external blame; both the Male and Female Choruses attempt to dissuade Tarquinius in "Lucretia... What do you want?", not on the basis of the disgusting nature of his crime, but because they believe Lucretia may too readily comply:<sup>193</sup>

*Go! Before your nearness*

*Tempts Lucretia to yield*

*To your strong maleness!*<sup>194</sup>

Referring to earlier historical accounts of Lucretia, Howard argues that Britten and Duncan's omission of the slave further enhances Lucretia's culpability. Whilst Livy and Ovid's accounts both see Tarquinius threaten Lucretia's honour, proposing to intertwine her body with the body of a dead slave, Britten and Duncan do not include this narrative. Without such a threat to her honour, Howard argues that it is conceivable that Lucretia may not have felt any threat at all, rather the possibility of her seduction by Tarquinius seems more viable.<sup>195</sup> Therefore we see another plane of blame enacted within the opera; where I typically distinguish between the internal guilt felt by Lucretia (internal blame), and the external blame imposed by her co-

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<sup>191</sup> Britten, p. 290.

<sup>192</sup> Seymour, p. 91.

<sup>193</sup> Evans, p. 142.

<sup>194</sup> Britten, pp. 214–16.

<sup>195</sup> Howard, p. 39.



characters, Britten and Duncan instil a third layer of blame from their authoritative position as authors when they remove the threat to her honour (authorial blame).

### Ambiguity in Conclusion

The result of simultaneous Christianisation, implication of complicity, and forgiveness, is that *Lucretia*'s conclusion is ambiguous in nature. This is arguably enhanced by the partial revisions made to the libretto, after its submission to the Lord Chamberlain's reader of plays H.C. Game, that fail to either completely affirm or deny Lucretia's complicity.

Britten's *Lucretia* subsequently straddles an enormity of features present in pre-existing accounts; however, where Augustine and Chaucer address the singular issues of complicity and forgiveness respectively, Britten and Duncan incorporate both of these themes without such definitive clarity and deft. Firstly, where Augustine wholly implies Lucretia's complicity, thus subverting her virtue, Britten and Duncan half-heartedly imply Lucretia's complicity instead, after failing to fully remove or instil the offending lines; secondly, where Chaucer has Lucrece swoon, thus eliminating any possible complicity and leaving her fate to men, Britten's Lucretia does not faint. Instead, she remains conscious, is partially implied to be complicit, and then is forgiven by Collatinus anyway.

The Christian framework that is then cast over the pagan narrative further complicates the conclusion: whereas the Roman Lucretia is conclusively praiseworthy and virtuous, and the Christian Lucretia conclusively unpraiseworthy and adulterous and/or self-murderous, Britten's is neither decisively praiseworthy nor unpraiseworthy. This may be due, in part, to the separation in faith cultures. Where pagans are concerned with a shame culture that depends on public reputation, and Christians are concerned with a guilt culture that depends solely on the judgement of God, Britten's *Lucretia* employs both cultures at once.<sup>196</sup> Seymour therefore argues that in Britten's account, ambiguity is created when Lucretia is unable to distinguish between shame and guilt.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Donaldson, p. 34.

<sup>197</sup> Seymour, p. 96.

Shakespeare effectively combines the two cultures in a narrative that foregrounds the private sorrow of Lucrece as she is granted extensive opportunity of speech, as she attempts to dissuade Tarquin from raping her. He therefore creates a parallel between the absolutist tendencies of Tarquinius and Queen Elizabeth I's monarchical republic, in which the Queen was criticised for not acknowledging the advice of her counsel. This therefore disengages the reader from the pagan and Christian faiths it drifts between, as the reader is presented with a superior absolutist form of power in the form of Tarquin. As Harper-Scott argues, Britten's Lucretia is granted twenty-six variants of 'No!' before Tarquinius rapes her, thus drawing a parallel between the extensive speech both Shakespeare and Britten offer.<sup>198</sup> Whilst Shakespeare's *Lucrece* succeeds in its religious subtlety, Britten's mingling of faiths is rather more intense; the pagan narrative is given a Christian framework in which Lucretia is compared to the virgin Mary in "Interlude: Here in this scene you see", and the epilogue presents audiences with the image of Christ upon the cross, dying for man's sin.

Howard claims that Britten's Christian epilogue becomes irrelevant when Tarquinius is seen as a symbol of fate, as this excludes the concept of sin. The opera therefore does not conclude decisively on the side of sin and redemption, or of fate, thus rendering the Christian epilogue nonsensical. Howard further criticises Britten's use of Chaucerian forgiveness: if Tarquinius is the only figure to have sinned, Lucretia should not be forgiven by Collatinus. Therefore, the metaphor of Christ dying for man's sin falsely forgives Lucretia, and implicitly forgives Tarquinius (and the like) for his crime.<sup>199</sup> Evans also believes the epilogue is incohesive, contending that if the opera concerned the issue of spirit defiled by sin, this message could have existed more effectively on a purely pagan level without the Christian framework.<sup>200</sup>

Kildea does not definitively condemn Britten and Duncan's ambiguous use of a Christian narrative that sees Lucretia complicit, as he believes it is this ambiguity that later comes to characterise many of Britten's operas.<sup>201</sup> However, the ambiguity

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<sup>198</sup> Harper-Scott, "Post-War Women", p. 97.

<sup>199</sup> Howard, pp. 38–43.

<sup>200</sup> Evans, p. 141.

<sup>201</sup> Kildea, p. 273.

created was arguably accidental, due largely in part to the revisions Britten and Duncan were forced to impose, which consequently destabilised the narrative of the opera. Nonetheless, Harper-Scott offers two interpretations of the opera's mingling of faiths. Firstly, the Christian epilogue could serve to highlight the entirely unchristian nature of Lucretia's decision to commit suicide post-rape; or secondly, Christ's death serves not only to atone for man's sin, but to absolve audiences of guilt. Harper-Scott dislikes this second conclusion, arguing that audiences are provided with the sentiment that sinners such as Tarquinius will always be forgiven.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Harper-Scott, "Opera about Rape", pp. 85–88.

## Authorial Will: Post-Britten's *Lucretia*

In both Shakespeare and Britten's accounts, through Lucretia and Tarquinius, authorial will is instilled by granting the protagonists extensive speech. Both accounts see Lucretia ultimately ignored by Tarquinius after attempting to dissuade him from raping her, which demonstrates the rape of authorial will: inserting his own authorial will into the narrative, Shakespeare highlights the absolutist tendencies of a superior power unwilling to bend to the will of the Other. In this section I will therefore rely heavily on Greenstadt's theory of the figurative rape of authorial will, previously discussed in section 3, in which the literal act of rape is united with Tarquin's ignorance of Lucrece's extensive speech and Shakespeare's metaphor of absolutism. Whilst Shakespeare utilises Lucrece to refer to the inferior public as the symbolic Other, whom Queen Elizabeth did not respect or consult, Britten's symbolic Other is not so clear. Greenstadt extends this use of metaphor further: much like Tarquinius, the reader of the poem can interpret, or indeed misinterpret the narrative as they wish, and it is ultimately up to them what they do with the information received. This misinterpretation by the reader or absolutist figure of power, implies a figurative rape of Shakespeare's (or inferior figure lacking in power) authorial will; however, gentler terminology may be used to argue a similar point. It is possible for the authorial will of Lucretia, Shakespeare and Britten to be undermined, weakened or damaged without such extreme accusation of 'figurative rape'.

## Weakening of Authorial Will: Britten and Duncan's Opera and Libretto

Britten and Duncan were forced to change lines that implied Lucretia's complicity, after submitting a draft of the libretto to the Lord Chamberlain's reader of plays H.C. Game, who found features of the libretto disturbing insofar as Lucretia was implied to be partially complicit in her own rape.<sup>203</sup> In "Working with Britten", Duncan explains the strenuous time frame of only four days to draft the text for the Christian epilogue, and a single day to provide the text to "Interlude: Here in this scene you see". Meanwhile, the legal team of French playwright André Obey accused Duncan of plagiarism, demanding royalties and acknowledgement within the score; a legal

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<sup>203</sup> Kildea, pp. 268–73.

process that would have delayed the premiere of the opera. As such Britten encouraged Duncan to give in, and assured Duncan that those who compared the texts of Duncan's libretto and Obey's *Le Viol de Lucrece* would not agree that Duncan plagiarised. It is on this basis that I propose Britten and Duncan did not base their opera and libretto on Obey's play (as previously discussed in my literature review).<sup>204</sup>

The combination of revisions and the falsely credited influence of Obey have had a potentially drastic effect; however, Kildea argues that Britten and Duncan's working relationship may too have contributed to the opera's downfall. In *Memoire*, Duncan explains: "Ben and I knew that, left to ourselves and undivided by the spite of the creative, we could write an opera a year for the next twenty years, taking no more time than three to four months on each".<sup>205</sup> Kildea accredits the opera's demise to the deliberately fast-paced, high turnover of Britten and Duncan's collaborative output.<sup>206</sup> Had Britten and Duncan allowed themselves time to either develop a fully-functional Christian narrative, or remove any aspect of Christianity altogether, the opera may not have suffered such ambiguity in its conclusion, and such harsh criticism as a result.

Shakespeare creates ambiguity as to whether one should interpret his *Lucrece* through a pagan or Christian lens intentionally, encouraging the reader to disengage with the faith of the narrative, and instead focus on the tyrannical absolutist power. However, Britten and Duncan's ambiguity derived from clumsiness in execution as they were hindered, not only by Lord Chamberlain, but by their own jeopardising time constraints. It is poetically ironic, therefore, that in striving to recreate a Shakespearian Lucretia, and to achieve a sense of authorship that could result in weakened authorial will through Tarquinius's deliberate misinterpretation of Lucretia, Britten and Duncan's own authorial will is weakened before the opera's publication and premiere. The opera is then subject to further undermining of authorial will post-publication and premiere. Shakespeare's epic poem may be subject to misinterpretation of authorial will post-publication, but did not undergo the same complications and revisions during its composition.

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<sup>204</sup> Duncan, pp. 74–81.

<sup>205</sup> Duncan, p. 88.

<sup>206</sup> Kildea, p. 280.

Duncan contends that Britten reacted badly to the criticism following the premiere of *Lucretia*, which was generally hostile: however, Britten failed to acknowledge that it was he who insisted upon the Christian framework, allowing Duncan to receive blame for its narrative tension.<sup>207</sup> Britten was often spiteful to those who criticised him, insisting that he and Duncan were no geniuses, rather than? the opera critics were stupid. Leaping on the praise of Imogen Holst, who praised *Lucretia* as a ‘1946 B minor mass’, he attested that opera critics were merely ‘faded intellectuals’.<sup>208</sup> In addition, Duncan insisted that those people involved in the artistic production (singers, instrumentalists, conductors and producers) generally enjoyed the opera.<sup>209</sup>

### Weakening of Authorial Will: Post-Britten’s *Lucretia*

Due to the destabilised faith of *Lucretia*, the opera can be subject to any number of interpretations, misinterpretations and criticisms from opera-goers, critics, and scholars alike, thus resulting in the undermining of Britten and Duncan’s authorial will. Kildea argues that once opera producers were faced with the flawed narrative, some resorted to ‘solving’ the issue using visual cues. One such production saw the Female Chorus look on, aghast, as the Male Chorus compares Lucretia’s suicide to the death of Christ upon the cross, therefore articulating and mimicking the disbelief potentially faced by members of audiences.<sup>210</sup>

As I discussed earlier, Harper-Scott provides an anecdotal example in which he saw a production by the Danish Royal Opera, re-branded ‘*Lucretia*’, wherein the scene depicting Lucretia’s rape was completely removed, and fellow scholars attempted to downplay the significance of Lucretia’s rape. These scholars engaged in an established discourse in which Lucretia is frequently believed to be complicit in her own rape, a discourse that Harper-Scott finds uncomfortably similar to modern-day attitudes towards raped women. Whilst the concept of complicity in rape is abhorrent, to ignore previous narratives that imply a Christianised sense of complicity would be to ignore the narrative foundations of Duncan’s libretto, including

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<sup>207</sup> Duncan, p. 168.

<sup>208</sup> Mitchell, Reed, and Cooke, III, pp. 237–38.

<sup>209</sup> Duncan, p. 85.

<sup>210</sup> Kildea, p. 272.

that of Shakespeare. Furthermore, to overlook Shakespeare's epic poem, and therefore also his own authorial will, demonstrates an undermining of Shakespeare's authorial will by Harper-Scott. However, Harper-Scott's concern for the Danish Royal Opera's removal of Lucretia's rape is still viable; in removing the crux of the opera, the producers must therefore be demonstrating a misinterpretation of Britten and Duncan's authorial will.

Here we see a chain reaction appear: Britten and Duncan included a narrative that sees Lucretia complicit in her own rape, the Lord Chamberlain forced them to remove this, the rushed revisions were clumsy, and this resulted in a flawed narrative. The resulting critical reception was poor, which resulted in producers editing the opera (which in turn, resulted in further poor critical reception), and this resulted in harsh scholarship which condemned the narrative. Many contributing factors therefore resulted in the demise of *Lucretia*, including not least the revisions, but also the frustrating ignorance of literary traditions possessed by many opera scholars (some of whom completely unaware of traditions of Christianity and complicity).

The issue cannot be effectively solved by producers without infringing on the concept of historical authenticity. In changing the narrative of the opera and disregarding those concepts of Christianity and complicity that one might find difficult, one would not only risk undermining Britten's authorial will, but also risk side-lining the historical traditions upon which Britten's opera is founded. Had Britten and Duncan removed every aspect of complicity, the opera would have adhered to the authentic pagan narrative of Livy and Ovid; however, it would still have possibly benefited from the removal of Christianity altogether. If the opera had included Lucretia's temptation and complicity, alongside the forgiveness of the male characters, it would have adhered to the implications of Augustine's Lucretia; like Augustine, Britten would have fully subverted Lucretia's pagan virtue to deplore her by Christian standards. If the opera had included just the forgiveness of men, but no implied complicity from Lucretia, it would have resembled the account according to Chaucer, where the fate of Lucretia lies in the hands of men. Finally, if the opera had involved both the pagan and Christian faiths, but still incorporated the ignorance of Lucretia's will by Tarquinius, and her subsequent death, it may have resembled

Shakespeare's account. Vital to the narrative, however, is the use of Lucretia as a metaphor to confront issues beyond the pagan legend itself.

Many scholars have attempted to reach an understanding of the opera's ambiguous conclusion, surrounding the nature of Britten as an outsider. Seymour argues that despite their fame, Britten and Duncan were both forced to live as outsiders in their society as conscientious objectors during the Second World War. Therefore, Britten may have related to Lucretia, who, being an integrated member of her Roman society, is alienated due to her publicly proclaimed chastity, thus resulting in her rape and subsequent suicide. Whilst former historical legends reinstate Lucretia as a metaphor for issues beyond the pagan plot, Seymour argues that Lucretia's rape by Tarquinius represents the violation of human nature by humanity.<sup>211</sup> Duncan's "Working with Britten" may confirm these theories, in providing an opera review in which the critic likens Britten's *Lucretia* to the state of Europe during and after the Second World War; whilst Tarquinius is compared to Hitler, the Etruscans are compared to Nazis, and the unlawful conquest of Rome is compared to the conquest of most of Europe. To sum up the narrative concisely, Britten's *Rape of Lucretia* comes to represent the figurative rape of civilisation.<sup>212</sup>

Beyond the conclusions of the opera, Kildea believes Britten's implication of Lucretia's complicity, and choice in the opera's subject matter, demonstrates a lack of empathy and understanding of women. This is then further echoed in Britten's later operas, which generally do not include substantial female roles.<sup>213</sup> One may ask, therefore, why Britten does not give women the same opportunities within his operas as men, and why he and Duncan felt compelled to imply Lucretia's complicity. However, like Harper-Scott, Kildea demonstrates a level of disregard for former narratives that involve complicity.

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<sup>211</sup> Seymour, pp. 76–77, 87.

<sup>212</sup> Duncan, pp. 89–90.

<sup>213</sup> Kildea, pp. 273–76.



## 5. Conclusion

Throughout my thesis I have explored and compared a wide scope of themes regarding the legend of Lucretia, in order to demonstrate the transformative power of legends and mythology as a means by which particular behaviours and morals are encouraged or discouraged. I have assessed the way in which themes of gender, rape, Christianity, complicity, ambiguity in conclusion, and authorial will have been manipulated, subverted, omitted and added within each poetic account. These historical poems have frequently been historically situated, and the legend of Lucretia frequently employed as a metaphor for events beyond the narrative. Though he did not study the source poems I have discussed, Britten chooses to straddle all of the features presented by the historical poets I have studied.

Where scholars such as Harper-Scott may be disappointed in the side-lining of the act of Lucretia's rape, this side-lining engages within a larger discourse in which Lucretia comes to metaphorically represent events external to the pagan plot. Within my thesis I have encouraged the reader to unite these two themes: firstly, the act of Lucretia's rape; and secondly, the external events of which Lucretia comes to metaphorically represent. I have happened upon two common research questions when embarking on my research: firstly, why is the dark, gruesome image of a raped and suicidal woman so frequently used in literature and art? And secondly, why did Britten feel personally compelled to engage with this discourse? These questions should be united to gain a fruitful understanding of Britten's motives and intent behind the opera: What does Britten's *Lucretia* come to historically represent?

Much scholarship surrounds Britten's homosexuality and his relationship with tenor and Male Chorus, Peter Pears. In addition, both Britten and Duncan were openly pacifist, a political stance that saw Britten move to America with Pears as conscientious objectors during the Second World War, only a few years before the composition of *Lucretia*. A large amount of scholarship concerns not only Britten's sexuality, but its expression, manifestation and permeation throughout his compositions; I have therefore argued that a fruitful understanding of Britten's *Lucretia* may only be obtained if his compositional process is assessed alongside any potential external narratives.

Critics and scholars have drawn comparisons between the legend of Lucretia regarding Britten's opera, to the state of Europe during and after the Second World War; in which the tyrannical Tarquinius is compared to Hitler, the Etruscans are compared to Nazis, and the unjust conquer of Rome is likened to the defeat of most of Europe; therefore, Britten's *Lucretia* comes to represent not only the figurative rape of civilisation, but the infringements upon Britten's nature.<sup>214</sup> Where Lucretia's Otherness lies in her chastity, Britten's lies in his pacifism and homosexuality; where Lucretia is oppressed by men and patriarchal values, Britten is oppressed by a society that condemns both conscientious objectors and homosexuals; where Rome was oppressed by the Etruscans, Europe was oppressed by Hitler and the Nazis; and where Lucretia resolves her rape through suicide, Britten addresses the infringement of violence by departing from Britain.<sup>215</sup> One may once again ask why Britten was compelled to engage in a discourse surrounding the rape of a woman; however it may have been Lucretia's Otherness that Britten related to.

In analysing the music of specific sections of Britten's score and Duncan's libretto in unity with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, I have demonstrated an understanding of Britten's effective and creative compositional strategies, and these may also give weight to the parallels I have drawn to external events. Where the women of *Lucretia* are relegated to the privacy of home in *Spinning wheel*, Britten's homosexual relationship too was relegated to privacy; where Tarquinius is depicted as a relentless horse, void of inhibitions, Hitler and the Nazis swept most of Europe without mercy; where Lucretia's rape is instilled within her as an internal blame in the starlight of *She sleeps*, Britten could be demonstrating England's culpability in warfare, in which those who conscientiously objected were typically condemned, and those who actively took part were praised.

Here we see that the features I explored within section 3 endure throughout the whole transformation of the Lucretia legend – where the historical poets do not give female characters such as Lucretia any depth of character – and where they undermine her contribution and destabilise her status as an exemplum, we find that

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<sup>214</sup> Duncan, pp. 89–90.

<sup>215</sup> Brett, pp. 175–85.

Britten too bows to these features. Moreover, Britten endures these features on a personal level, whereupon his authorial will is denied and disrespected.

In my dissertation I have drawn upon this parallel; where the authorial will of Shakespeare's epic poem is foregrounded to demonstrate the interpretation and re-interpretation of extensive speech and counsel, Britten's opera has been interpreted and re-interpreted before, during and after its initial run of productions. This resulted in the opera's transformation before its premiere, after which it suffered further criticism for its incohesive narrative, criticism that later echoed throughout scholarship and future productions, in which the opera's plot has been drastically changed to accommodate.<sup>216</sup>

I have argued throughout my thesis that Britten's opera and Duncan's libretto suffered unnecessary complexity and ambiguity after the pagan and/or Christian faith in which Lucretia was situated was destabilised by last-minute revisions. This leads me to a reluctant conclusion; whilst I have endeavoured to discover the definitive meaning of Britten's *Lucretia* as a metaphor, this may only exist in various speculative hypotheses. One may struggle to understand the intent of Britten and Duncan's compositional and narrative decisions in an opera transformed beyond the composer and librettist's control. Throughout my thesis I have attempted to discuss Britten's *Lucretia* as a metaphor, an attempt that scholars unfamiliar with historical poems of *Lucretia* have not. I therefore propose that in so doing I have encouraged a discourse surrounding the musico-poetic analysis of Britten's *Lucretia*, that offers an insight into the transformative power of mythology and legend as metaphor.

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<sup>216</sup> Harper-Scott, "Opera about Rape", pp. 65–66.

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