

## Inflexible Roman Women — The Case of Lucretia

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### Introduction

This paper<sup>1</sup> is a renewed attempt to add new nuances to the picture of one lady belonging to Archaic Rome, as she was described by a male Roman author belonging to the early Principate of Augustus. The author is Titus Livius, author of *Ab urbe condita libri*, written in the decades before the beginning of our era; the lady is Lucretia, princess of the royal family in the City of Rome during the 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. It is my hope that this analysis will demonstrate that Livy was capable of transferring a basically conventional story of violence into a linguistically and thematically complex series of pictures where nothing is quite what it at first sight seems to be: the putative heroes fail to live up to expectations, the villain remains a villain, to be sure, but at the same time fails to pursue his evil role to the end, and the victim emerges as the real hero of the drama. Lucretia's character is furthermore contrasted to that of another lady of the same historical era, Tullia, daughter of Servius Tullius, penultimate king in Rome, and the willing accomplice of his slayer.

The story of the Rape of Lucretia, needless to say, has been told and analysed many times over; among indispensable modern works we may mention the Commentary of Livy, Books 1-5, by R.M. OGILVIE (1965), and the monograph on the Lucretia myth, by I. DONALDSON (1982). Both authorities put the story into its historical and intertextual perspective. We will refer to these and other works as becomes necessary, but in the main our analysis will follow a track of its own and concentrate entirely on the story as told by Livy.

The thesis we shall present is in many ways inspired by that of Saint Augustine, who discussed the story at length and, among other things, argued that

(...) this Roman lady avidly sought glory. Her great fear was that, if she remained in life, people would believe that she had willingly suffered the thing that she had been compelled to suffer while alive. Therefore she considered that her punishment must be administrated before the eyes of her men, as a proof of her character, since she could not demonstrate her conscience to them. She felt shame of being thought

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<sup>1</sup> Its first version appeared in the *Festschrift* to my colleague, Professor Gunilla Iversen (*Hortus troporum, Florilegium in honorem Gunillae Iversen*, edd. Alexander Andrée and Erika Kihlman, Stockholm 2008, Acta universitatis Stockholmiensis, Studia Latina Stockholmiensia 54:327-342) and profited very much by the kind comments of Professor Christina S. Kraus (Yale University) and Dr Erika Kihlman. I take full responsibility for any remaining errors in language or facts. Inevitably, I have had a few new ideas since then and have also found a number of errors to correct.

an accomplice of the crime, if she patiently suffered the disgusting thing a man had committed against her.<sup>2</sup>

We concur in this characterization and will try to expand on it by showing that Livy's tale of the Downfall of the Kings of Rome contains a vision of an inflexible Roman *matrona*, an innocent victim of violence who chooses her own way in the face of rape and pushes a group of men, vacillating, helpless and powerless against malicious tyranny, into rebellion. First, however, the story of Lucretia as narrated by Livy<sup>3</sup> ought to be recounted, with emphasis put on certain details.<sup>4</sup> Before we start we shall make one – perhaps unnecessary – observation: Livy's version of the story of Lucretia's fate is not the first account of this drama; unlike readers of modern crime novels, the readers of Classical Antiquity were fully aware of the name of the victim and the perpetrator; they also knew what crime to expect and the outlines of the story, as told by earlier writers. What they did not know beforehand was which twists and turns Livy was going to introduce into his story – to them, therefore, the scenery along the road would have proven a greater surprise than the name of the destination.

### **The Story**

Lucretia's evil fate is part — but not merely part — of a longer story describing the events that led up to the revolt of the Roman citizens against the ruling dynasty of the Tarquins and the subsequent introduction of the Republic; the Rape of Lucretia is presented as the very catalyst of the revolution.<sup>5</sup> In the last year of the reign of Tarquinius Superbus, probably about the year 508 B.C. (225 years after the legendary foundation of Rome), the Roman army made war on the Rutuli, a people living along the shore of the Tyrrhenian sea to the south of the Tiber, and putting siege to Ardea, their capital. This, as Livy notes, was a tedious business for the young Roman officers, and they compensated for their boredom by partying or going off to Rome on furlough. At one of these parties, the officers present began comparing and boasting about their wives. One of the guests was Collatinus Tarquinius, himself a relative of the King. He suggested a practical way of settling the competition and of proving the superior merits of his own wife, Lucretia:

Well, we have all the vigour of youth, so why don't we get onto our horses and inspect our wives' characters in place? Let this be the best proof for everyone: that which meets the eye upon the husband's unexpected homecoming!<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Civ.* 1,19,3 ... Romana mulier laudis avida nimium verita est, ne putaretur, quod violenter est passa cum viveret, libenter passa si viveret. Unde ad oculos hominum mentis suae testem illam poenam adhibendam putavit, quibus conscientiam demonstrare non potuit. Sociam quippe facti se credi erubuit, si, quod alius in ea fecerat turpiter, ferret ipsa patienter.

<sup>3</sup> The same story was retold by Ovidius (*Fasti*, II, 685-852), who added poetic flavour (not least by addressing the protagonists direct) but did not significantly change the basic plot.

<sup>4</sup> Livy 1,57-60. All translations of Latin passages offered in this paper are by myself, as I often wish to put the formal emphasis on the words emphasised in the Latin; this is a point of view that cannot always be observed in modern literary translations

<sup>5</sup> Livy's technique of using women's misfortunes as catalysts for men's actions is investigated by KRAUS 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Livy 1,57,7 Quin, si uigor iuuentae inest, conscendimus equos inuisimusque praesentes nostrarum ingenia? Id cuique spectatissimum sit quod necopinato uiri aduentu occurrerit oculis

The party immediately broke up and the squadron of inebriated princes rode off to see what they would see at Rome. Livy artfully not only saves the name of the winner until last but, by mentioning the princesses only in a subordinate clause, puts the entire focus on Lucretia:

Arriving at Rome at early dusk, they carried on to Collatia, where they found Lucretia — not at all like the royal wives, who had been found passing their time partying amorously with their equals — sitting late at night busily spinning wool in the lamp-light with her serving-women. The praise in this womanly contest belonged to Lucretia.<sup>7</sup>

OGILVIE<sup>8</sup> offers the following comment on this passage: “the scene is pure New Comedy again, already familiar from Terence and so perhaps actually staged by Menander.” Although it would be true to say that the husband’s unexpected homecoming is a common motif in Comedy, we may also note that Livy does not exploit it: the deceived husbands, finding their wives cavorting at night, are not described as shocked or upset; they are actually not described at all. They do not even stay home in order to reproach their spouses (for causing them to lose their wagers, if not for marital infidelity); instead, they ride on with the party of princes in order to do the most important thing on their agenda: to settle the bet.

Lucretia did not remain in the passive role of being found; she immediately went on to proving her qualities as a Roman *matrona* by handsomely receiving her husband and his companions. The victorious husband, finally, graciously invited the princes to his home. This generosity engendered an unexpected reaction:

Then an evil lust took hold of Sextus Tarquinius: to violate Lucretia by force. Not only her beauty but even more her proven chastity roused him.<sup>9</sup>

Livy here in a few words offers us a brilliant contrast between the proud and unsuspecting husband who, in his desire to show off his treasured, virtuous wife, puts her squarely into the sights of a villain to whom the good and virtuous is the most alluring target of all. But Collatinus was governed by the laws of hospitality and could hardly have acted differently, given the fact that he had invited the princes to his house as part of *certamen muliebre*.

We now reach the first climax of the story, the point where Sextus Tarquinius becomes the agent of evil. A few days after the princes’ outing, Tarquinius without Collatinus’ knowledge returned to Collatia with one follower,

where he was received kindly by people who know nothing about his plan. When, after the evening meal, he had been taken to the guest-room, he was burning with love and, as everything seemed quite safe and everybody about him fast asleep, he went, drawn sword in hand, to Lucretia where she lay sleeping and, while the woman’s breast was held down by his left hand, he said, ‘Be quiet, Lucretia, I am Sextus Tarquinius; my sword is in my hand; you shall die if you make a sound.’ At the moment when the woman, frightened out of her sleep, could see no help but death threatening her at close quarters, Tarquinius started professing his love, he prayed, he mixed threats with entreaties, he twisted the woman’s soul hither and

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<sup>7</sup> Livy 1,57,8-9 Quo cum primis se intendentibus tenebris peruenissent, pergunt inde Collatiam, ubi Lucretiam haudquaquam ut regias nurus, quas in conuiuio lusuque cum aequalibus uiderant tempus terentes, sed nocte sera deditam lanae inter lucubrantes ancillas in medio aedium sedentem inueniunt. Muliebris certaminis laus penes Lucretiam fuit.

<sup>8</sup> OGILVIE 1965:222.

<sup>9</sup> Livy 1,57,10 Ibi Sex. Tarquinius mala libido Lucretiae per uim stuprandae capit; cum forma tum spectata castitas incitat.

thither. When he saw that she was obstinate and would not yield even by fear of death, he added dishonour to her fear: he said that he would strangle a slave and put his nude body beside her dead one, with the consequence that she would be said to have been killed during sordid adultery.<sup>10</sup>

Although he had brought a possible accomplice to Collatia, Tarquinius alone prepares and perpetrates his crime. It is remarkable that this Roman prince and warrior, to whom the raping of a defenceless woman would not have appeared as a remarkably difficult or dangerous thing, chose to treat the situation as a military operation: first by verifying that all was safe, then by approaching this sleeping, unarmed lady as if he were about to storm a citadel, carrying his battle sword;<sup>11</sup> not only did he bring it along, he had drawn it and, holding it at the ready in his hand, he told his victim that he was prepared to use it for killing her.<sup>12</sup> At the start of the episode, we might choose to believe that Tarquinius carried his sword in order to defend himself against any opposition from the men of the house, but his own words to Lucretia make it clear that he was brandishing it in order to threaten her. Tarquinius' attack is not very war-like,<sup>13</sup> instead he reaches his goal by twisting his helpless victim's mind in order to drive her to voluntary surrender. When he cannot sway Lucretia by threat of death, he does not resort to main force but challenges her sense of honour. The stratagem works, Tarquinius has his way:

When his lust — a quasi-conqueror — by terror had overcome her obstinate virtue, and Tarquinius had afterwards departed, arrogant after his successful defeat of a woman's honour, Lucretia, full of grief because of this great evil, sent one single messenger, first to her father in Rome and then to her husband at Ardea, asking them to come, each accompanied by one faithful friend;<sup>14</sup> quick action was needed, she said; a frightful thing had happened.<sup>15</sup>

Taken as a description of a rape, this passage is a remarkable linguistic achievement. It forms one single grammatical period, where the main clause is very brief: "Lucretia sent

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<sup>10</sup> Livy 1,58,2—4 Vbi exceptus benigne ab ignaris consilii cum post cenam in hospitale cubiculum deductus esset, amore ardens, postquam satis tuta circa sopitique omnes uidebantur, stricto gladio ad dormientem Lucretiam uenit sinistraque manu mulieris pectore oppresso 'Tace, Lucretia,' inquit; 'Sex. Tarquinius sum; ferrum in manu est; moriere, si emiseris uocem. Cum pauida ex somno mulier nullam opem, prope mortem imminem uideret, tum Tarquinius fateri amorem, orare, miscere precibus minas, uersare in omnes partes muliebrem animum. Vbi obstinatam uidebat et ne mortis quidem metu inclinari, addit ad metum dedecus: cum mortua iugulatum seruum nudum positurum ait, ut in sordido adulterio necata dicatur.

<sup>11</sup> In the paintings of this scene that are reproduced by DONALDSON (1982), Plate 1 (Titian), Plate 2 (Florentine artist), Plate 13 (Tiepolo), and Plate 14 (Gentileschi), the sword is depicted as a dagger, Tarquinius is fully dressed, Lucretia is mainly naked, and Tarquinius' companion is peeping from behind a curtain. It is clear that these artists had not read their Livy very carefully.

<sup>12</sup> The latter fact informs us that Livy did not use the drawn sword as a metaphor.

<sup>13</sup> He keeps this personal quality to the end: he was assassinated by old enemies of his at Gabii, just after the revolution (Livy 1,60,2), without taking part in a real battle.

<sup>14</sup> Is this an echo of Tarquinius' single companion? If so, they served quite different purposes in the narrative, as Lucretia's injunction to her husband and father is very the instrument that brings Brutus into the action — he would otherwise have been left out of the action entirely. Tarquinius' companion did nothing at all.

<sup>15</sup> Livy 1,58,5 Quo terrore cum uicisset obstinatam pudicitiam uelut uictrix libido, profectusque inde Tarquinius ferox expugnato decore muliebri esset, Lucretia maesta tanto malo nuntium Romam eundem ad patrem Ardeamque ad uirum mittit, ut cum singulis fidelibus amicis ueniant; ita facto maturatoque opus esse; rem atrocem incidisse.

one single messenger” (*Lucretia ... nuntium ... eundem ... mittit*). Lucretia is therefore the grammatical subject of the very period where Tarquinius performs his rape. Tarquinius, on the other hand, is the grammatical subject merely of one temporal clause “when Tarquinius had departed” (*cum ... profectus ... Tarquinius ... esset*), an action that was not part of the rape (he would have had to leave the house anyway); the actual rape is described in the initial temporal clause, where Tarquinius’ *libido*,<sup>16</sup> not Tarquinius himself, is the formal subject. Livy offers no physical detail at all. This being so, the conclusion is obvious: Lucretia is the real agent and it is her actions that are put into focus.

From a formal and linguistic point of view, Tarquinius therefore is not the real protagonist of this story, being driven by his lust into violence and to an eventual personal catastrophe. He is the formal grammatical subject of two actions only: when he attempts to persuade Lucretia by twisting her mind and when he makes his eventual departure. Even when he is pressing her down to subjugate her, the real sentence-subject is his left hand. His lust (*libido*) defeats Lucretia’s virtue (*pudicitia*); he himself is arrogant (*ferox*) after having conquered her honour (*decus*).

According to Livy, thus, Lucretia did not yield to Tarquinius’ physical strength and threat of violence but surrendered when fearing to suffer dishonour. Tarquinius’ ultimate threat was *dedecus*; after the deed he was *ferox expugnato decore muliebri* (“arrogant after his successful defeat of a woman’s honour”). *Decus* and *dedecus* are attributes that Livy does not often relate to women,<sup>17</sup> and in his story, Lucretia clearly did not feel that she would be diminished in virtue or honour by physically yielding to Tarquinius but she was convinced that this would happen if her dead body were found alongside that of a naked slave. Lucretia’s exceptional qualities were perfectly understood by Tarquinius, too: so long as he attacked her with actions and arguments that he probably considered would be effective on a woman’s mind he got precisely nowhere; it is only when he changed his tactics and appealed to her sense of honour that she surrendered. It therefore appears that she judged the situation in the same way as Tarquinius did, but the sequel makes it clear that she did not receive her values from him: they were her very own, and she herself dictated the consequences of her actions. Livy’s mode of description creates two distinct human characters, Tarquinius standing out as a fully-fledged psychopath, carefully evading responsibility for his physical crimes, but taking pride in his clever application of mental extortion. Lucretia, on the contrary, holds a consistent set of moral and social values, and she does not hesitate to apply them on herself.

When Collatinus and her father arrived at Collatia, Lucretia was in command of the situation. She sat gloomy in her chamber, only bursting into tears on their arrival, and when they asked if everything was all right, she explained what had happened and baldly told

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<sup>16</sup> This expression probably foreshadows Tarquinius’ eventual fate — it is essential to remember that the story of Lucretia was perfectly well known to Livy’s readers.

<sup>17</sup> In the first five books of *AUC*, we find twenty-three instances of the noun *decus* (in the nominative or *casus obliqui*), and eleven of the noun *dedecus*; *decus* eight times describes things (e.g. 2,7,4 “sed multo maius morti decus publica fuit maestitia”), twelve instances are attributes of men (e.g. 2,12,10 [Mucius Scaevola talking] “longus post me ordo est idem petentium decus”), while only one instance (that belonging to the text discussed) is an attribute of a woman; *dedecus* is once an attribute of women (viz. that in the text discussed), six times of men (e.g. 4,3,42 “milites ... uinci se per suum atque illorum dedecus patiebantur”), four times of things (e.g. 1,40,3 “cum commune Romani nominis tum praecipue id domus suae dedecus fore”).

her husband that his bed had been violated. The tears<sup>18</sup> and the graphic description of the defilement of Collatinus' bed were probably designed as skilful rhetoric leading up to her requesting the men's oath that this deed should not go unpunished. She concluded in the same vein by naming the perpetrator:

Sextus Tarquinius is the man — an enemy not a guest — who by main force and by violence last night stole this pleasure that will be the death of me and, if you are truly men, of him, too.<sup>19</sup>

Her menfolk swear the oath but try to comfort her by turning the guilt from the victim of the crime to its perpetrator: sin, they argue, is in the mind not in the body, and where there is no intention to sin there is no guilt.<sup>20</sup> So doing they introduce a set of values contrary to what we might expect in a situation like this. They do not react with moral outrage against her ultimate choice between the two evils, nor do they regard her as tarnished by the rape itself, but concentrate on the legal principle of distinguishing “between *peccata* committed *dolo malo* and those *sine dolo*. To prove *dolo malo* it was necessary to establish intention (*consilium*).”<sup>21</sup> She is not swayed by this argument:

You shall judge what he deserves: for my part, although I absolve myself from guilt, I do not free myself of punishment. In future no adulteress shall stay alive on the strength of Lucretia's example. A dagger, that she kept hidden under her dress, this she buried in her breast, and collapsing<sup>22</sup> over her wound she fell down dying. Husband and father cry out together.<sup>23</sup>

In this part of the story the men do very little: they offer consolation, they cry out in grief. Lucretia, on the other hand, has decided on her course of action, has prepared the instrument for it, and inflexibly proceeds along her chosen path.

KRAUS (1991:318) points out: “the damage done to a woman — Lucretia, Verginia, or Fabia — is explicitly said to be the catalyst of political change.”<sup>24</sup> The change itself, however, is worked by the women's menfolk, who are compelled to take action. When we try to judge the nature of the action taken by Lucretia's two male relations, Collatinus her husband and Spurius Lucretius her father, we must discuss this in a larger perspective, for the Lucretia episode is only part — albeit the actual turning point — of the Saga of the Downfall of the Tarquini and the Rise of the Roman Republic. This wider context offers a number of interesting points that are now to be examined.

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<sup>18</sup> The tears might also be construed as an unexpectedly childish trait of Lucretia's and one designed to evoke the reader's instant empathy: like a child that had hurt herself she withheld her tears until she had a sympathetic audience.

<sup>19</sup> Livy 1,58,8 *Sex. est Tarquinius qui hostis pro hospite priore nocte ui armatus mihi sibi que, si uos uiri estis, pestiferum hinc abstulit gaudium.*

<sup>20</sup> Livy 1,58,9 *Dant ordine omnes fidem; consolantur aegram animi auertendo noxam ab coacta in auctorem delicti: mentem peccare, non corpus, et unde consilium afuerit culpam abesse.*

<sup>21</sup> Cf. OGILVIE (1965: 225), who argues that Livy here merely expresses the legal opinion of his own time.

<sup>22</sup> Prof. KRAUS has pointed out to me that Livy here uses the perfect participle of *prolabor* 3, just as in the earlier description where Brutus fell down and kissed the earth (Livy I,56,12; cf. above). I believe that in the case of Brutus, the verb is used to create a slapstic effect, demonstrating his reputed ineptness, while here, it has the purpose of creating dramatic exactitude.

<sup>23</sup> Livy 1,58,10 ‘Vos,’ inquit, ‘uideritis quid illi debeatur: ego me etsi peccato absoluo, supplicio non libero; nec ulla deinde impudica Lucretiae exemplo uiuet.’ *Cultrum, quem sub ueste abditum habebat, eum in corde defigit, prolapsaque in uolnus moribunda cecidit. Conclamat uier paterque.*

<sup>24</sup> Cf. also JONES & SIDWELL (1997 p. 8): “It is a curiosity of early Roman history that at some key turning-points we find stories about women.”

### The Narration Moves in Circles

Lucretia's rape can be said to be the turning point in the story of the tyranny of the Tarquin dynasty, as it is this outrage that provokes her father, her husband, and the husband's companion and relative, L. Iunius Brutus, to start the revolt that brings about the downfall of this dynasty. Within the narrative itself, it also serves other purposes: it goads Lucius Iunius into tearing off his habitual mask of stupidity and tardiness that not only rendered him the cognomen of Brutus (the Dunderhead)<sup>25</sup> but also saved his life during the murders committed by the Tarquini. The rape of Lucretia finally puts an end to a series of three narrative circles or repetitive patterns<sup>26</sup> – descriptions of men starting on quests, doing what they came to do, and returning home – that we may regard as symbols of the quality of life under tyranny.

The first circle starts with the story of Brutus.<sup>27</sup> The King of Rome watched a portent that frightened him: a snake had fallen to the floor from a wooden column and started a commotion among the King's followers and a general flight into the palace. The King desired to learn the meaning of this portent, hence sent a delegation to Apollo's oracle at Delphi, considering this to be the most prestigious among oracles. To this end, he chose two of his sons, Titus and Arruns Tarquinius, and ordered Brutus to accompany them, not as a true companion but as an object of jest. Brutus brought a private present to Pythia: a golden rod hidden inside a hollow rod made of cornel-wood (a symbol of his double nature). We never learn from Livy what interpretation the oracle offered the princes concerning the snake; we do learn that the youngsters asked her a question of their own, a more pressing one, namely, who was to succeed to the throne of Rome. The oracle answered from the depth of her cave:

Supreme authority in Rome will fall to him among you, young men, who shall have brought his mother a kiss.<sup>28</sup>

The two brothers, wishing to keep Sextus, their kid brother, ignorant of this response ordered it to be kept completely secret and drew lots on which of them should kiss his mother first. Brutus found a different meaning in Pythia's words and, pretending to have stumbled by mistake, fell down and kissed the ground, assuming that Earth is our common mother. The company then returned to Rome and the war that was preparing against the Rutuli.

In this section of the narrative we receive a clear picture of the double natures of Brutus and an indication that his future power, gained by his correct interpretation of the prophecy, was to be of a republican kind — an *imperium*, not a *regnum*;<sup>29</sup> we are also given a story of three gentlemen (and their entourage) making a circular movement by riding or sailing away on an errand and eventually returning home.

In the following section of the story (narrated in an abridged form above) we are offered a second story involving circular movement: a number of inebriated princes ride

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<sup>25</sup> Livy 1,56,8

<sup>26</sup> For an analysis of Livy's use of repetitive patterns, see KRAUS 1994:21-24, with further references.

<sup>27</sup> Livy 1,56, 4

<sup>28</sup> Livy 1,56,10: *imperium summum Romae habebit qui uestrum, o iuuenes, osculum matri tulerit.*

<sup>29</sup> Livy makes no point of Pythia's evasive formulation: *summum imperium* does not necessarily mean "monarchy" but is a Republican term for the power held by the consuls.

away from camp in order to inspect their wives' morals and settle a bet. Having done so, they return to camp.

Next follows yet another instalment of this travelling in a circle: two men (Sextus Tarquinius and his nameless companion) ride off from camp; Tarquinius fulfils his evil desire, and the two men return to camp.

Of course, the circular action of going away on an errand, finding what you sought, and returning home, is quite a normal human undertaking. Repeated three times in a row in this narrative, however, it offers an impression of monotony and helplessness, particularly when contrasted retrospectively with the sequel.

### **Lucretia's Dagger Cuts the Circles**

In the fourth section, the expected circular motion is cut short by Lucretia, who takes over the action from the men: she calls her menfolk home, makes a brief speech, and strikes herself with the dagger. From this point onwards the narration follows a straight line, offering no subsequent homecoming. Brutus, standing over Lucretia's dead body, blood-stained dagger in hand, takes the lead with an inspired speech, exhorting the others to movement in rebellion; marvelling at this sudden appearance of a quite new personality, the other men proceed to follow him on a march against the Tarquinian tyranny. They carry Lucretia's body to Collatia and raise the town; thence they march on to Rome, where Brutus makes yet another inspiring speech of which Livy only offers a partial report in *oratio obliqua*; when Brutus has related (in indirect speech) the indignities suffered by free Roman citizens, Livy breaks off the narration in a rather unexpected manner:

By these words and others even harsher, caused by the indignation against present events and therefore — as I believe — difficult for historians to report, Brutus drove the angry populace into depriving the King of his power and into decreeing that L. Tarquinius was to be sent into exile along with his wife and children.<sup>30</sup>

As reported by Livy, the people's indignation and their decision to depose the Tarquins appear more interesting than Brutus's speech, which was the original cause of the indignation. Livy actually denies Brutus the part of an active hero; his assigned task is to make speeches and perform power politics by talking. The revolutionaries ride off to Ardea, led by Brutus, while Lucretius remains at Rome to exercise the authority of *praefectus urbis* (a title already granted him by the King); when the King hears of the revolt and hurries to Rome to quell it, Brutus hears of his coming and avoids a meeting by turning off the main road — in this narration Collatinus has no part at all to play.<sup>31</sup>

About the same time, but on different roads, Brutus arrived at Ardea, the King at Rome. *Tarquinius clausae portae exsiliumque indictum* "For Tarquinius, closed gates and exile decreed" — when he so desires, Livy is a master of brevity and chiasm. The liberator of the city was received by a happy army and the King's sons were expelled. The Roman

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<sup>30</sup> Livy 1,59,11 His atrocioribusque, credo, aliis, quae praesens rerum indignitas haudquaquam relatu scriptoribus facilia subiecit, memoratis incensam multitudinem perpulit ut imperium regi abrogaret exsulesque esse iuberet L. Tarquinium cum coniuge ac liberis.

<sup>31</sup> Livy 1,60,1-2 eodemque fere tempore, diuersis itineribus, Brutus Ardeam, Tarquinius Romam uenerunt. Tarquinio clausae portae exsiliumque indictum: liberatorem urbis laeta castra accepere, exactique inde liberi regis.

Republic was formally created with the election of Brutus and Collatinus to the rank of Consul.

From this point onwards Brutus is not remarkable for straightforward and warlike action; his picture, as painted by Livy, is a complicated one, but as a power politician he appears as a schemer, primarily in his relation to Collatinus his first colleague and Lucretia's widower. Very soon during their year in office, a rumour was spread that the very name of Tarquinius was hateful to the City and that the Tarquinius were unable to live as private citizens, their very name being disgusting and a danger to liberty;<sup>32</sup> quickly the rumour grew into a storm, and Brutus called the people to a gathering where he pleaded that the Roman people did not believe their freedom to be complete. He turned to his colleague and told him that — although he had been instrumental in removing the kings — his very name was a threat to this freedom and that he ought, therefore, to depart and relieve the people of their fears.<sup>33</sup> Collatinus resigned, the Tarquinius were all driven into exile, and a new consul was elected in Collatinus' stead. Soon afterwards,<sup>34</sup> Brutus was placed in a difficult quandary: a number of noble youths, ardently desiring the return of the King and the easier times they had enjoyed during the monarchy, formed a conspiracy to restore the kingdom. Among these youths were the two sons of Brutus, Titus and Tiberius, who were given a key role. Having been exposed, all conspirators were condemned to death, “and this punishment was the more remarkable because the Consulate imposed on the father the duty of exacting revenge on the sons, and precisely he, who should have been kept from being a spectator, was put forward by Fortune to be the executor of the punishment.”<sup>35</sup> Fortune's irony is the more remarkable, as the inflexible nature of the Law was one of the reasons Livy offers for the young men's conspiracy.<sup>36</sup>

Not very long afterwards there was war with the deposed King, who had turned for support to his Etruscan relatives, Veii in particular. Before the subsequent battle, Brutus went out on an exploration ride with a few knights in his company; he then encountered prince Arruns Tarquinius, who, recognizing the man who had deprived his family of their Kingdom, charged against Brutus.

Brutus realized that he was under attack; at that time it was fitting for the generals themselves to enter into the fray; therefore he eagerly offered himself to the battle; and so violently did they charge that neither remembered to protect his own body, so long as he could wound his enemy, with the consequence that both had their

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<sup>32</sup> Livy 2,2,3 Nescire Tarquinius priuatos uiuere; non placere nomen, periculosum libertati esse.

<sup>33</sup> Livy 2,2,7 “Amicus abi; exonera ciuitatem uano forsitan metu; ita persuasum est animis cum gente Tarquinia regnum hinc abiturum.”

<sup>34</sup> Livy 2,3 – 2,5.

<sup>35</sup> Livy 2,5,5 ... sumptumque supplicium, conspectus eo quod poenae capienda ministerium patri de liberis consulatus imposuit, et qui spectator erat amouendus, eum ipsum fortuna exactorem supplicii dedit.

<sup>36</sup> Livy 2,3,3 ... regem hominem esse, a quo impetres, ubi ius, ubi iniuria opus sit; esse gratiae locum, esse beneficio; et irasci et ignoscere posse; inter amicum atque inimicum discrimen nosse; leges rem surdam, inexorabilem esse, salubriorem melioremque inopi quam potenti; ... “The King [the conspirators said] was a man from whom you could obtain whatever you required, be it justice or injustice; with him there was place for favours, for good services; it was possible to be angry and to forget; you knew the difference between friend and enemy; the law was a deaf thing, immovable by prayer, better and more advantageous for the powerless than for the mighty one.”

shields perforated by counter-strokes and fell dying from their horses, two spears sticking to them.<sup>37</sup>

There is an unavoidably comic element in this story of two warriors so inept at sword-play that they kill each other. But this is the ending Livy or Roman historiography awarded to Brutus, the Revolutionary. It is difficult in a short paper, dealing with another subject, to do justice to the complexity of this saga, but I do not believe it unfair to say that the only heroically decisive action permitted Brutus by Livy is the part he played right after Lucretia's suicide – the rest of the story depicts him rather as a political schemer, a rigid adherent to the Law, or as a less than competent warrior. His death concludes the Saga of the downfall of the Kings of Rome. Their rise had been engineered by Romulus by means of a fratricide; their end was unwittingly caused by Sextus Tarquinius's breach of one of the most fundamental principles of civilization, that of hospitality. The last king, Tarquinius Superbus, had been brought to power thanks to his wife's action of murdering her father. Livy does not spare the symbolism when depicting the criminal character of the Roman Kingdom.<sup>38</sup>

### Summary of the Characters

The tumultuous story of the final days of the monarchy is narrated with three male characters, Collatinus Tarquinius, Sextus Tarquinius, and Brutus; and by one female protagonist, Lucretia.

Brutus, whose tale is the longest one, turns up after the portent of the snake, when he is added as a companion to the two princes who were sent to Apollo's oracle; however, he instantly makes himself the grammatical subject of the narrative<sup>39</sup> by assuming and confirming his role as the dunderhead of the company; then he is, once more, represented in the passive voice<sup>40</sup> when he is transported to Delphi and is said to have carried a personal gift, a rebus symbolising his true nature, to Apollo. At his next appearance he accompanies Collatinus and is once more described as a chance companion.<sup>41</sup> After Lucretia's suicide, Brutus reverts to the active role, holding Lucretia's dagger in front of him and enjoining the others to swear an oath of revenge; he then hands over the dagger to them and becomes the object of their admiration, whereupon they follow him to the small town of Collatia; the others were content to join the town-dwellers in a helpless grumbling against the tyranny, but Brutus once more assumed the active role, making an inspired speech that Livy reports in the *oratio obliqua*.

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<sup>37</sup> Livy 2,6,8 Sensit in se iri Brutus; decorum erat tum ipsis capessere pugnam ducibus; auide itaque se certamini offert; adeoque infestis animis concurrerunt, neuter dum hostem uolneraret sui protegendi corporis memor, ut contrario icti per parmam uterque transfixus duabus haerentes hastis moribundi ex equis lapsi sint.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. also JONES & SIDWELL (1997 p.4): "The Roman foundation myth was a very complex one. It was also different from the Greek ones in the way in which it did not point up positive elements like good order or natural advantages. Far from it. It focused instead on things which were agreed to be bad – wildness, exile, rootlessness, brutality and killing. ... That the Romans said all this about their early days tells us much about their view of the world in the late Republic and early Empire."

<sup>39</sup> 1,56,7 Is ... statuit: "he ... decided"

<sup>40</sup> 1,56,9 Is tum ... ductus ... dicitur: "he was transported ... and is said."

<sup>41</sup> 1,58,6 Collatinus cum L. Iunio Bruto uenit, cum quo forte Romam ueniens ab nuntio uxoris erat conuentus: "C. came with L. Iunius Brutus, with whom he he happened to be travelling to Rome when overtaken by his wife's messenger."

Brutus then made himself into a critic of tears and complaints without action and was the author of the thing that was fitting (as he said) for men, yea, for Romans who dared rise in arms against their enemies.<sup>42</sup>

This is his real moment of glory. In his subsequent career — already been recounted above — he is described as a political schemer and upholder of the majesty of the Law, not as a military hero. His manner of death, as we have noted, is more ludicrous than heroic.

Tarquinius Collatinus, although the husband of Lucretia, holds no important part in the drama. The passage that illuminates his character most clearly is that where he good-naturedly invites the princes to his home, boasting about his Lucretia's womanly virtues, and unwittingly exposing her to the criminal passion of Tarquinius. After her death he did not do much that Livy found worth recounting, and was summarily dismissed from office by Brutus for the insulting reason that the very name of Tarquinius was hateful to Rome.

Sextus Tarquinius, the villain of the story, is described in a more complex fashion: when we first encounter him he is the victim of his brothers' scheming and contempt; he comes into his own when he is driven by his passion into Lucretia's bed-chamber. Afterwards his actions are briefly noted by Livy but hardly in a way that renders him more memorable.

The good male characters, as we have to conclude from the above discussion, are only permitted by Livy to show brief glimpses of true competence, when they act out of conviction and for a heroic cause. The evil protagonist himself is driven by his passions rather than driving himself: even the rape is committed only because of Lucretia's decision that it is the lesser of the two evils that confront her.

### **Lucretia: a Victim?**

Lucretia is commonly seen as a helpless victim of royal tyranny, while the men involved — Collatinus, her husband; Sextus Tarquinius, the rapist; Brutus, the revolutionary — are seen as the agents of the story, whether for bad or good. As DONALDSON<sup>43</sup> notes:

It is through women, writes Simone de Beauvoir, that certain historical 'events have been set off, but the women have been pretexts rather than agents. The suicide of Lucretia has had value only as a symbol.' The agent in this story is a man; Lucretia, the woman, merely suffers.

The views of DE BEAUVOIR<sup>44</sup> and DONALDSON are two of the many we challenge in this paper. Among others is that offered in an anonymous epigram quoted by OGILVIE:<sup>45</sup>

*Casta Suzanna placet: Lucretia, cede Suzannae!  
Tu post, illa mori maluit ante scelus.*<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> 1,59,4.... tum Brutus castigat lacrimarum atque inertium querellarum auctorque quod uiros, quod Romanos deceret, arma capiendi aduersus hostilia ausos.

<sup>43</sup> DONALDSON 1982:10.

<sup>44</sup> DE BEAUVOIR 1949:200 "... événements ont été déclenchés : mais elles ont été prétextes beaucoup plus qu'agents. Le suicide de Lucrèce n'a eu qu'une valeur de symbole."

<sup>45</sup> OGILVIE 1965:220.

<sup>46</sup> "Suzanna is pleasing in her chastity. Lucretia, give way to Suzanna! You preferred to die after the crime, she before it."

Another opinion is that of Casanova who, as quoted by OGILVIE,<sup>47</sup> was surprised that Lucretia did not commit suicide before the rape. Casanova clearly missed the point of Tarquinius' persuasion. Saint Augustine, on the other hand, as we have already stated, offers a much more pertinent observation — he obviously had a clear opinion of the mentality of a heathen Roman — but there is, nonetheless, much more to be said about Lucretia's predicament and her actions.

When the tale of Lucretia's fate is re-told in modern times, she is still normally portrayed as a victim. In the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, the article bearing her name, written by Andrew DRUMMOND,<sup>48</sup> affords her eleven lines of text, concluding with the remark: "... particularly, in Livy, Lucretia becomes a paradigm of the Roman *matrona* (married woman), heroic in her resolute adhesion to the code of female chastity. In reality, however, she is the victim not only of male violence but also of the ideology of a patriarchal society."<sup>49</sup> This is a view that smacks of political correctness but fails to report the fact that Lucretia according to Livy made a personal choice: Livy does not describe her as the victim of an ideology but rather as the formulator and enforcer of one.

Sylvia GRAY KAPLAN<sup>50</sup> offers a résumé of the story with much more nuanced comments:

Motivated, therefore, by a sense of honor, Lucretia submitted to Tarquin's demands as the lesser of two evils.

[...]

If the story is accepted as basically valid, the question arises why Lucretia committed suicide when she was innocent of wrongdoing. Even if she had been allowed to live, the idea that any subsequent offspring might be tainted by the violation would have been difficult to face, and perhaps she was unwilling to live life as what would have been seen as a marred woman. She certainly believed, accurately, that she would ensure a vendetta against the House of Tarquin by her death.

KAPLAN's first observation is pertinent: Lucretia's choice was indeed dictated by her sense of honour and she selected that evil which Livy (and Ovid) considered that she regarded as the lesser one. But KAPLAN takes no notice of the twisted situation we have commented upon above; furthermore, when she questions the reason for Lucretia's suicide, she clearly does not take Lucretia's own perspective into account, but suggests that Lucretia's father and husband might have rejected her as a consequence of the rape. Livy, however, makes it abundantly clear that this is very far from being the case: when Lucretia committed suicide, she knew quite well from her husband's and her father's arguments that they believed her innocent, and that they certainly did not see her as a "marred" woman; instead Livy makes them view her situation from a legal standpoint, arguing that, in the absence of an intention to do wrong, Lucretia was innocent of any moral tainting.

We might add, on a crasser level, that the rapist was a prince of the royal dynasty, and a relative by marriage to boot. If Lucretia had decided to stay alive, she could have found a socially acceptable consequence of the episode — as Tarquinius appears from the narrative and his own words to have been motivated by lust and love alike — in divorcing

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<sup>47</sup> OGILVIE 1965:220.

<sup>48</sup> *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed., edd. S. HORNBLOWER and A. SPAWFORTH, Oxford 1996, p. 888.

<sup>49</sup> DRUMMOND 1966.

<sup>50</sup> KAPLAN 2001.

Collatinus and marrying Tarquinius. Livy's narrative suggests that Tarquinius' wife was one of those princesses who failed to live up to Lucretia's Roman standards of morality; Lucretia herself was obviously of sufficiently high rank to be acceptable as Tarquinius' bride. It is, of course, very difficult to estimate what excess of sexual misbehaviour would have been unacceptable to the Romans cowering under the Tarquinian dynasty. We may offer a comparable instance: at the time when Livy wrote the first book of *Ab urbe condita*, Rome had quite recently encountered the phenomenon of a lady of high rank marrying a man who was not the father of the child in her womb. The lady was Livia Drusilla, who in the year 39 B.C. divorced Tiberius Claudius Nero in order to marry Octavian, who was ten years later to assume the title of Augustus. The son of Nero's that she bore in 38, about the time she married Octavian, was Drusus, younger brother of the future emperor Tiberius.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, Livy's narration at the end of Book I is not so simpleminded as to represent all women as innocent and passive victims; it is very easy to find at least one woman, coeval with Lucretia, who offers us a picture of conscious evil, without being a mere plaything or catalyst for men's actions. She was the younger daughter of Servius Tullius, penultimate King of Rome, who had two daughters, Tullia maior and Tullia minor; each had married a Tarquin: Lucius Tarquinius and Arruns Tarquinius. These two were brothers but, just like their wives, of widely different characters.

By chance it so happened that the two violent characters were not joined in matrimony, thanks to Fortune, as I believe, in order that Servius' reign would last the longer and the good character of the state might be settled. The cruel Tullia was pained that there was no stuff in her husband for passion or derring-do; she turned entirely to the other Tarquin and admired him, called him a real man and born of royal blood; she despised her sister because she had won a man but lacked a woman's daring.<sup>52</sup>

Tullia rectified this mismatch:

Quickly, she filled the young man with her recklessness; when Lucius Tarquinius and Tullia minor by almost uninterrupted funerals had freed their homes for a new marriage, they were joined in matrimony, Servius not opposing rather than approving of it.<sup>53</sup>

When the time came for murdering Servius, which it did quite soon, Lucius performed the actual killing, but Tullia was not an unwilling bystander:

Afterwards, a horrible and inhuman crime is narrated, and a place is there as a monument — it is called the Criminal Alley — where it is told that Tullia, out of her mind because her sister's and her husband's Furies were hounding her, drove her waggon over her father's dead body, and that she brought part of the blood and

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<sup>51</sup> For a brief account of Livia's life, see, for instance the article "Livia" in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 876 (with further references).

<sup>52</sup> Livy 1,46,5-6: Forte ita inciderat ne duo uiolenta ingenia matrimonio iungerentur, fortuna, credo, populi Romani, quo diuturnius Serui regnum esset constituique ciuitatis mores possent. Angebatur ferox Tullia nihil materiae in uiro neque ad cupiditatem neque ad audaciam esse; tota in alterum auersa Tarquinium eum mirari, eum uirum dicere ac region sanguine ortum; spernere sororem, quod uirum nacta muliebri cessaret audacia.

<sup>53</sup> Livy, 1,46,9: Celeriter adulescentem suae temeritatis implet; L. Tarquinius et Tullia minor prope continuatis funeribus cum domos uacuas nouo matrimonio fecissent, iunguntur nuptiis, magis non prohibente Seruio quam adprobante.

evidence of her patricide in her blood-dripping carriage (herself contaminated and spattered) to her own Penates and those of her husband; shortly, through their anger at the evil beginning of a reign, a similar ending followed.<sup>54</sup>

Returning to the protagonists of the rape of Lucretia, we may note that it is quite possible, although Livy makes no mention of it, that Sextus Tarquinius's innately evil character was made even more evil by the humiliation he had suffered as a result of the *certamen muliebre*: the fact that his own wife had so signally failed to demonstrate the character of a true Roman *matrona* may have filled him with a longing to avenge himself on Collatinus and his virtuous wife.

Livy is a brilliant narrator, writing in a high and complicated literary style that compelling the modern reader to a careful study of each word, analysing its meaning and function, but he does not offer a complete account of the actions he narrates, leaving many pictures unpainted and things unsaid, thereby giving his ancient and modern readers a chance of adding details and theories of their own.

### **Conclusion**

Within the Saga of the Downfall of the Roman Kings, Lucretia is not merely a catalyst of men's actions but the true protagonist, re-directing the action of the story from the helpless circular movements of the Monarchy, to the arrow-straight progress of the Republic. Confronted with the choice of two evils, fearing neither sex, nor violence, nor death, Lucretia without hesitation chose that action which preserved her honour. This is a quality of character that we might expect a male author to award a male protagonist, but in Livy's story, the three main male characters are acquiescent, followers, schemers, subservient to their superiors or to their passions, failing to live up to their assumed characters. The woman, alone, is cast in a true mould and capable of following a line of action that is at the same time true to the requirements of the legend and the demands of her own character.

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<sup>54</sup> Livy 1,47—49, particularly 48,7: Foedum inhumanumque inde traditur scelus monumentoque locus est — Sceleratum uicum uocant — quo amens, agitantibus furiis sororis ac uiri, Tullia per patris corpus carpentum fertur, partemque sanguinis ac caedis paternae cruento uehiculo, contaminata ipsa respersaque, tulisse ad penates suos uirique sui, quibus iratis malo regni principio similes propediem exitus sequerentur.

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