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Revenge, Rhetoric, and Recognition in *The Rape of Lucrece*

Throughout his career, Stephen Greenblatt (*Will in the World*, 388) tells us, William Shakespeare “was fascinated by exotic locations, archaic cultures, and larger-than-life-figures”. His usual practice is to place imaginative encounters with ethnic, religious, or political others in far-away locales. Shakespeare’s brothels are in Vienna, his Moors camped out on Cyprus, his Jews safely stowed away in Venice. But Shakespeare, like many of his contemporaries, also exoticized the past. Rome is often the ideal against which primitive Britain is measured, but Rome itself can be *terra incognita*. The crime at the heart of *The Rape of Lucrece* complicates further Shakespeare’s engagement with Roman otherness by inviting author, narrator, and readers opportunities for cross-gendered identification that aligns them at once with both victim and perpetrator in the rape that underwrites nation-building in this episode from Roman history.

The Rape of Lucrece explores the violation and subsequent suicide of a virtuous matron who has suffered a brutal acquaintance rape at the hands of her husband’s friend and martial comrade, Tarquin. The poem not only records in detail the act of rape, but explores subsequently the victim’s physical and emotional trauma, her eloquent exploration of the moral dilemma in which she finds herself, and her public confession and death. After the crime is committed, the rapist slinks away like a dog and eventually is doomed by the Romans to “everlasting banishment” (l. 1855). The poem’s prefatory Argument informs us further that all of the Tarquins are banished and that the Roman monarchy is succeeded by a republican government, with kings being replaced by consuls.

From the perspective of national history, innocent Lucrece has necessarily suffered—indeed, been sacrificed—for the good of Rome. Framed this way, *The Rape of Lucrece* sounds very much like a story of individual and community wrongs corrected by just retribution against the wrongdoer and a subsequent renewal of the state. As Heather Dubrow argues, however, *Lucrece* is governed by *syneciosis*, the trope by which logical and moral antitheses collapse continually into oxymoron. Dubrow (164) sees the conflict between the

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providentially framed prose Argument and emotionally charged poem in light of the Renaissance debate between History and Poesy as methods for capturing events from the distant past, although she also recognizes that the overriding logic of *syneciosis* forestalls such neat binaries. To achieve a rapprochement with Shakespeare's Lucrece as exotic other from an archaic past, we need to resist epic history's teleological imperative and explore instead the poetic byways of thought and emotion the poem and its heroine offer up for our consideration.

Revenge as Justice

The Rape of Lucrece begins, in its prose Argument, with an emphasis on public injustice. The Argument passes quickly over the private crime lying behind this slice of history—the “cruel murder” of his father-in-law by Tarquin’s father Lucius—in favor of dwelling on the *pater*’s public crime: possessing himself of the Roman kingdom, in contradiction to “Roman laws and customs,” without the “people’s suffrage” or consent (*Rape of Lucrece*, Argument). Public justice is restored when Tarquin’s offense is “published” and the Romans, their suffrage restored, “give consent” to his “everlasting banishment” (ll. 1852, 1854-55). Yet once the poem proper has commenced, questions of public justice and the people’s rights recede into the background. “Lust-breathed” Tarquin (l. 3) considers almost exclusively the rape’s consequences for himself: at risk are his martial honor (“O shame to knighthood and to shining arms”); his family name and tomb (“O foul dishonor to my household’s grave”); his Roman piety (“O impious act including all foul arms”); and his more literally embodied manhood (the specter of “[a] martial man [made] soft fancy’s slave,” ll. 197-203). Tellingly, the stanza ends with a glimpse of infamy’s physical toll, Tarquin’s vicious act legibly engraved “in *my* face,” the personal pronoun “my” erupting forcefully from his long list of abstract objects and institutions. Tarquin’s friendship with Collatine, furthermore, figures only belatedly into his deliberations (ll. 218-39, *passim*), and even then he moves quickly from acknowledgment that seducing Collatine’s wife would betray Tarquin’s friendship with him to musing about a counter-factual scenario in which seduction of Lucrece might be justified as revenge had Collatine murdered a Tarquin relative. The closest that Tarquin comes to considering actual others in his deliberations is when he imagines how his own descendants will “curse my bones” and “wish I their father had not been” (ll. 209-210).

At the end of the poem, Lucrece adopts an equally self-referential perspective, calling on the Romans to revenge the crime against her. In a final anguished colloquy with herself before the Roman lords arrive to hear her message, Lucrece vows that she will not die until Collatine has heard her story,

“That he may vow, in that sad hour of mine, / *Revenge* on him that made me stop my breath” (ll. 1179-80; emphasis added). Between this point and her death, Lucrece utters the word “revenge” five times; once Brutus has removed the knife from her breast, appropriating to himself the visual and verbal signs of revenge, the word echoes an additional four times. In Lucrece’s iterated requests, revenge is allied syntactically with justice. She commands Collatine to be “suddenly *revenged* on my foe” because “sparing *justice* feeds iniquity” (ll. 1683, 1687; emphasis added). She asks the lords, as well, to plight to her their faith and “chase injustice with revengeful arms” (l. 1693). But all does not proceed as Lucrece proposes or even as Brutus promises, when he vows that “We will revenge the death of this true wife” (l. 1841); for in the end, a cooler justice wins out over hot revenge. In its final stanza, the poem matches the Argument’s pronouncement that “with *one consent* and general acclamation the Tarquins were all exiled” (Argument) with a direct verbal echo: “The Romans plausibly did give *consent* / To Tarquin’s everlasting banishment” (ll. 1853-55; emphasis added).

The Borrowed Bed

While *The Rape of Lucrece* unravels the symbolic coupling of justice with revenge, the poem also complicates its sense of public justice, mostly through Lucrece’s own evolving ethics. Even as she herself calls for revenge at the end of her poem, Lucrece’s language is shot through with evocations of alternative human relations. Resolving to die and posting her letter to Collatine, Lucrece determines that while Collatine himself should take revenge for her death, on her own recognizance she will “*bequeath*” to Tarquin her “stained blood,” which “by him tainted shall for him be spent / As is *his due* writ in *my testament*” (ll. 1181, 1182-83; emphasis added). In harmony with the male ethics of property relations, Tarquin owes a debt to Lucrece (or more accurately, her husband) for the blood that he has tainted; this legal and binding debt or “*due*” imposed on Tarquin is written—fixed by ink—in the printed poem or “*testament*” that bears her name.

Accompanying these paradoxical judicial metaphors are hints of a tangled economic calculus. Miriam Jacobson has analyzed the moral economics of rape in *Lucrece* through the figure of the cipher or “zero”—the null figure that, standing on its own, empties out meaning and substance, but self-multiplies by factors of ten when appended to another number. In the mathematics of the cipher, we see the particular economy of sexual transgression, for the empty “O” of female genitalia signifies not only woman’s sexual “lack,” but also the corporeal multiplication in pregnancy that naturally follows from sexual penetration of that null space. When Juliet marries Paris she will share in his body and possessions, “becoming yourself no less,” according to Lady Capulet;

but as the Nurse quips, Juliet will be “No less! nay, bigger; women grow by men” (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1:3:96, 97).¹ In the passage that we have been examining, Lucrece’s blood will be “spent”—and in the word “spent” we can perceive a conflation of the idea of spending as sexual depletion with spending as a perverse payment of fee, both of which can be a zero-sum game ending in bankruptcy. The word “bankrupt” appears thirteen times in Shakespeare’s plays and poems, two of them in *The Rape of Lucrece*.² The first occurrence comes when Tarquin is musing abstractly on the paradoxes of sexual covetousness:

Those that much covet are with gain so fond
That what they have not, that which they possess
They scatter and unloose it from their bond;
And so by gaining more they have but less,
Or gaining more, the profit of excess
Is but surfeit, and such griefs sustain,
That they prove *bankrout* in this poor rich gain. (ll. 134-40; emphasis added)

Lust’s satiety, the “expense” of sexual “spirit” in “a waste of shame” (Sonnet 129, l. 1), is both the physical depletion of semen and a loss of moral and spiritual capital through the very achievement of that satisfaction. After the rape is complete, Tarquin dwindles into a “bankrout beggar” (l. 711) who steals away “like a thievish dog” (l. 734), doubly exiled from Rome’s systems of economic relations by these metaphorical identifications with beggar and thief.

The judicial and economic mechanisms by which Lucrece reconfigures her relation to Tarquin recall Marcel Mauss’s classic study of the gift, in which systems of exchange, at once voluntary and constrained, bestow profit on and demand obligation from both parties. The spirit of generosity behind gift-giving is paradoxically fraught with rivalry and antagonism. We see this double-sided nature of economic and legal bonds in *The Rape of Lucrece* through her final testament, in which she “bequeathes” her tainted blood to Tarquin, the author of her harm, just as in the epilogue to *Troilus and Cressida*, Pandarus spitefully “bequeathes” his diseases to the audience (*Troilus and Cressida*, 5:11:24). As Mauss (63) notes, in Germanic languages the word “gift” also means poison, as the bequest of sexually tainted flesh and blood certainly does in Shakespeare.

Lucrece’s final, poisonous “gift” to Tarquin has a pre-history in the debate between rapist and victim over their varied and mutual social responsibilities. Trapped by Tarquin in her own bed, Lucrece resorts to ethical arguments:

¹ References to Shakespearean works besides *The Rape of Lucrece* are from *The Norton Shakespeare*.

² This is the count acquired through the search engine of the Shakespeare’s Words website: <http://www.shakespeareswords.com/>.

She conjures him [Tarquin] by high almighty Jove,
By knighthood, gentry, and sweet friendship's oath,
By her untimely tears, her husband's love,
By holy human law, and common troth,
By heaven and earth, and all the power of both,
That to his *borrow'd* bed he make retire,
And stoop to honour, not to foul desire. (ll. 568-74; emphasis added)

Reminding Tarquin of his broader obligations to others, Lucrece raises all of the same arguments against the rape that he previously had posed to himself. "Sweet friendship's oath" and "her husband's love" enter more quickly into Lucrece's dissuasion (ll. 569-70) than they do in Tarquin's own deliberations, and she insists that he "melt at *my* tears and be compassionate" (l. 594; emphasis added), adding herself to the list of Tarquin's moral debtors. The most material and troubling sign of Tarquin's debt to both Lucrece and Collatine, however, is the "borrowed bed," offered to him as a visitor to their home. Reciprocal obligations between host and guest provide a powerful deterrent to crime, as we see when Macbeth recognizes that as Duncan's host he should bar the door against murderers, not wield the knife himself (*Macbeth*, 1:7:14-16). The word "borrowed" brings into play a different set of ethical imperatives that complement the more abstract demands of law and legal vows but also intensify the iniquity of Tarquin's attempt to usurp the marital bed that belongs equally to Collatine and Lucrece. The bed, like the gift in Mauss's analysis, is permeated with significance; as the bequest of Shakespeare's second-best bed to Anne Hathaway might suggest, it is a particularly potent token of social obligation, not to be lent or borrowed lightly.

In Shakespeare's lexicon, the word "borrow" can have either a strictly economic meaning, as it does in *The Comedy of Errors*, when the Duke advises Egeon to "Beg thou or borrow to make up the sum" that would save him from death (*Comedy of Errors*, 1:1:154); or as it does when Shylock remarks to Antonio, "Methought you said you neither lend nor borrow / Upon advantage" (*Merchant of Venice*, 1:3:66-67). But in other instances, whether alone or in combination with the concept of "lending," to borrow signifies some kind of human interaction: one person's behavioral imitation of another, as when *King John's* Bastard alludes to inferiors "[t]hat borrow their behaviors from the great" (*King John*, 5:1:51); a fanciful or metaphorical exchange of attributes or body parts, as when Mercutio teasingly advises the downcast Romeo, as a lover, to "borrow" Cupid's wings (*Romeo and Juliet*, 1:4:17); a more complete impersonation, as when Kent, in disguise, seeks to "borrow" a less refined accent to fit his new rustic identity (*King Lear*, 1:4:1); and in a more brutal vein, one person's usurpation of another's status and physical place, as when the Duke

of *Measure for Measure* “borrow[s] place” of the disgraced Angelo (*Measure for Measure*, 5:1:359).³

When Tarquin violates not just Lucrece’s bed but *his own* “borrowed” bed by exchanging it for hers, he disrupts the system of social exchange—the logic of the gift—on which Roman stability is built. Most obviously, this violation is figured as property theft, the proper victim of which becomes a matter of contention between Lucrece’s father Lucretius and her husband Collatine:

The father says, “She’s mine”: “O mine she is,”
 Replies her husband, “do not take away
 My sorrow’s interest; let no mourner say
 He weeps for her, for she was only mine,
 And only must be wail’d by Collatine.” (ll. 1795-99)

When Lucretius claims precedence because he gave Lucrece life—figured as an altruistic act of generosity—Collatine retorts that “she was my wife; / I ow’d [owned] her, and ‘tis mine she hath kill’d” (ll. 1803-1804). And the narrator confirms his version of the deed as a violation of property rights by describing Tarquin as slinking away from Lucrece’s bedchamber “like a thief.”

Lucrece herself, by contrast, alludes to the economics of rape in the terms I have outlined above, as a violation of human relations by physical usurpation. Lucrece accuses Tarquin of having violated not only Collatine’s and her hospitality, as figured through the borrowed bed, but also of being “untrue” to himself by self-impersonation: “In Tarquin’s likeness I did entertain thee: / Hast thou put on this shape to do him shame?” (ll. 596-97). In effect, Tarquin has borrowed his own shape. Through this variation on Ovidian amatory metamorphosis, the rape collapses the boundaries separating Lucrece, Tarquin, and Collatine. While deliberating, Tarquin’s very mind is divided:

Within his thought her heavenly image sits,
 And in the self-same seat sits Collatine.
 That eye which looks on her confounds his wits;
 That eye which him beholds, as more divine,
 Unto a view so false will not incline,
 But with a pure appeal seeks to the heart,
 Which once corrupted takes the worse part. (ll. 289-94)

Both Lucrece and Collatine occupy Tarquin’s thought. By the logic of the metaphor, however, while Tarquin looks with two divided eyes (whose moods

³ These examples are found by searching *The Riverside Shakespeare* with Wordcruncher: Electronic Text Viewer (<http://www.wordcruncher.com/>).

and motives are very different), Collatine and Lucrece seem to vie for the same space (or “self-same seat”) in his head. Within the “seat”—either a dwelling place or a throne—of Tarquin’s thought, does Lucrece sit on her husband’s lap? Does one oust the other, as the Duke dismisses Angelo from his place of judgment or Petruchio dumps Kate from his lap? The bed of Lucrece becomes even more crowded than the seat of Tarquin’s thought when he bargains for her consent. Tarquin states that he intends to destroy Lucrece in her own bed (l. 514), even though in the next stanza he sweetens the deal by offering to remain her “secret friend” (l. 526). His negotiation includes the threat to place a fictional groom in Lucrece’s bed, the result being the scorn and shame that will follow her “surviving husband” (l. 519) and kinsmen, and the resultant bastardy of her descendants. While for Tarquin the curses of descendants were but a passing thought, we behold here the tragic loading of Lucrece’s bed—burdened with not only Lucrece, Collatine, and Tarquin, but the hypothetical groom, Lucrece’s kinsmen, and a never-ending procession of her bastardized descendants.⁴ Lucrece’s honor is now at the mercy of an inexorable mathematics of multiplication. The borrowed bed, the sign and agent of a hospitable exchange among Lucrece, Collatine, and Tarquin, has by its violation piled woe upon woe.

Recognizing Lucrece, or What’s Hecuba to Her?

The collapse of boundaries separating the agents in a gift economy is, as Mauss noted, a potential danger of the system itself. This collapse might also be called one possible manifestation of political “misrecognition.” In “Learning to Curse,” Stephen Greenblatt analyzes Caliban’s poetry and curses in light of colonialism’s double-edged narrative. In one strategy, the colonizer represents the colonized as speaking gibberish; in the second, the Other is represented as speaking flawless English. According to the first narrative, the native’s linguistic inferiority justifies colonization because the colonized are less than human; according to the second narrative, the native’s linguistic facility justifies colonization by absorption, since there is no linguistic distinction between colonizer and colonized. In both cases, the colonized are manipulated through the binary of identity and difference. The alternative that can disrupt this binary is what ethicist Charles Taylor has identified as the “politics of recognition.”

In his essay of that name, Taylor (25) begins: “A number of strands in contemporary politics turn on the need, sometimes the demand, for *recognition*” (emphasis in original); “and the demand comes to the fore in a number of ways

⁴ We are told that after the rape, Lucrece “bears the load of lust he left behind” and Tarquin “the burden of a guilty mind” (ll. 734-35), but I think that here the narrator’s perspective is overly narrow, too caught up in the horror of the moment to see the event’s full ramifications. It will remain for Lucrece herself to work out these implications.

in today's politics, on behalf of minority or 'subaltern' groups, in some forms of feminism, and in what is today called the politics of 'multiculturalism'. The "demand for recognition," Taylor (25) continues, derives from "the supposed links between recognition and identity," identity being in part

shaped by recognition and its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or *misrecognition* can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being. (emphasis in original)

For Taylor, in this frequently quoted passage, the politics of recognition is a necessary counterbalance to the tendency of nationalism to operate through the dialectic, identified earlier by Greenblatt, between the invitation to sameness ("be one of us") and a reification of difference (insiders can be identified in relation to designated, inferior "outsiders"). *The Rape of Lucrece* dramatizes this dialectic between sameness and difference within the emerging nationalism of Republican Rome. But more important and surprising, Shakespeare's poem also offers us a brief glimpse of a possible politics of recognition, located primarily in Lucrece's exploration of her physical and moral condition after the rape.

The "recognition"—whether personal or political, rational or emotional—that Lucrece receives from her father, husband, and the other Roman men is limited and incomplete. They echo dutifully Lucrece's assertion of her own innocence—"Immaculate and spotless is my mind," she declares (l. 1656)—confirming through unanimous assent that "her body's stain her mind untainted clears" (l. 1710). But Lucrece herself is finally reduced to a thing, a "bleeding body" (l. 1851) that the men will parade throughout Rome. In effect, the Romans complete the indignity inflicted on Lucrece by Tarquin during the rape, when he had effectively rendered his victim both silent and invisible. In order to be capable of carrying out his rape, Tarquin had to stop his ears against Lucrece's pleas and to avoid the very sight of her face and body. With his foot, Tarquin extinguishes the torch that illuminates Lucrece's bedchamber: "For light and lust are deadly enemies," as the narrator informs us. He also stifles Lucrece's cries, and her powerful arguments, by pulling her night clothes over her face in a gesture that is grotesque, almost comic:

The wolf hath seized his prey, the poor lamb cries;
Till with her own white fleece her voice controll'd
Entombs her outcry in her lips' sweet fold:

For with the nightly linen that she wears
He pens her piteous clamours in her head;

Cooling his hot face in the chastest tears
That ever modest eyes with sorrow shed. (ll. 677-83)

This image of Lucrece entombed in her own linen foreshadows the corpse that is paraded through Rome's streets at the end of the poem. By silencing Lucrece and effacing her person, the Romans have ironically replicated, perhaps even surpassed, Tarquin's effort to eradicate the object of his lust as a person who must be seen and heard—that is, to be recognized.

But it could have been otherwise, for *The Rape of Lucrece* gives us a glimpse of what the politics of recognition might look like. Lucrece, abandoned like a “castaway” after the rape, performs an extended complaint in which she apostrophizes a series of abstract entities—Time, Night, and Opportunity—in search of a culprit to blame for her situation. Lucrece's complaint, however, is punctuated by an intermittent desire for female companionship that might provide her with alternatives to solitary weeping and revenge. Imagining Tarquin, allegorized as Night, defiling Cynthia and her handmaids, Lucrece identifies them as potential conversationalists who could provide her with “fellowship in woe” (l. 791). Later, Lucrece calls on Philomel “to make thy sad grove in my dishevelled hair,” so that these two birds of a kind might exchange mournful ditties about the parallel crimes of Tarquin and Tereus (ll. 1133-34). Interestingly, at this crux in her meditation, Lucrece can imagine fellowship only in terms of a collapse of physical boundaries, realized through the visually confounding conceit of Philomel, presumably after her metamorphosis into a bird, nestling into Lucrece's hair. The two will also collaborate on a mournful song in which Lucrece, “burden-wise,” will “hum on Tarquin still” while Philomel “on Tereus descants better skill” (ll. 1133-34). Implicit in the musical programme that Lucrece sets for herself and Philomel, by contrast with the visual conceit of the bird in Lucrece's hair, is the separation of singers and musical lines that produces harmony.

In reaching out to Philomel, if only in a poetic sense, Lucrece also acknowledges the intellectual and emotional power of examples, a theme that is worked out at greater length when Lucrece remembers the “skillful painting of Priam's Troy.” This is where Lucrece begins to move from pathetic complaint into another rhetorical key. “Reading” sequentially through the painting's depiction of the fall of Troy, Lucrece encounters numerous figures and objects who pass through her field of vision as visual fragments: weeping tears, the gleaming eyes of dying people, wives lamenting their husbands, laboring pioneers in the thick of battle—“Begrimed with sweat, and smeared all with dust”—pale cowards, quaking peasants, and much more. This part of the poem derives not from Ovid, of course, but from Books 1 and 2 of Virgil's *Aeneid*, where Aeneas has a similar artistic encounter at the house of Dido. But while Aeneas beheld the tableau from a fixed subject position—himself—Lucrece, as

force behind the word “spend” as Lucrece “spends her eyes” on the sad shadow of Hecuba: she simply devotes all of her attention to Hecuba, depleting without calculation her own visual resources. Nor can we hear in the musical exchange between these older and younger tragic women any sense of a mercenary transaction: from the penciled figures in the Troy painting, Lucrece “borrows” looks and, in turn, “lends” to these figures her own words. Theirs is an emotional economy, beyond the institutions of law, debt, justice, sex, and power but still regulated by an ethical relation.

This is a watershed moment for Lucrece and *Lucrece*. Critics have noted how, in the poem, moral ethos manifests itself on the body through the language of heraldry. Lucrece’s modesty is figured in her face as a “silent war of lilies and roses” (l. 71).⁶ Tarquin imagines his own shame emblazoned through a “loathesome dash” in his coat of arms (ll. 206, 207). After the rape, however, Lucrece becomes both unreadable and incapable of social discourse. The maid who greets Lucrece sees “sorrow’s livery” in her mistress’s face (l. 1222), but dares not ask the reason. The problem of illegible faces proliferates as the groom who bears her letter to Collatine blushes from “bashful innocence” rather than, as Lucrece thinks, from “knowledge of her shame” (l. 1341). Their encounter culminates in mutual misrecognition, both parties blushing furiously as they misunderstand one another. Within the Troy painting, the narrator suggests, the “art of physiognomy” is more reliable. The painter offers a strong Character of Ajax, his eyes rolling with “rage and rigour,” and of Ulysses, who with a “mild glance” signaling his self-control, wear their hearts in their faces (ll. 1398, 1399-1400). But the art of perspective itself confounds simple characterology, for his spear is all that can be seen of Achilles (l.1421-28), the rest of the figure being hidden behind a press of people, and all we see of the war-weary Trojans are their eyes as they peep through the towers’ loopholes. Portraiture by synecdoche comes to signify social fragmentation for Greeks and Trojans alike. Worse, the Troy story offers in “perjur’d Sinon” an exemplar whose deceitful words and “humble gait” are both deceptive. Like Tarquin, he hides an evil mind within a “fair” form (ll. 1521, 1530), and Lucrece responds by tearing the painting or cloth with her nails. The encounter with Hecuba, by comparison, maintains the equity of exchange necessary to recognition, lending words and borrowing looks without breaching the artistic illusion or, metaphorically, the bodily boundary separating her from Hecuba. Telling “sad tales” of Troy’s fall, Lucrece *recognizes* Hecuba—physically, emotionally, morally, and ethically—in the way Charles Taylor imagines, and is poised to achieve some kind of social resolution, or reconciliation.

⁶ The “moral heraldry” employed by the narrator of *The Rape of Lucrece*, as well as the rhetorical function of the Troy painting generally in the poem, are discussed by Hulse, Dubrow, and Arkin, among others.

Lucrece's Eloquent Corpse

While I concur with those critics who sense a restoration of patriarchy, property, and male political domination at the conclusion of *The Rape of Lucrece*, there remains one final opportunity for ethical and political recognition based on the feminine model established by Lucrece and Hecuba: the emblem constructed through visual and verbal dialogue between Lucrece's body and the narrator's text. Once Brutus has removed the knife from Lucrece's breast, her "bubbling" blood

doth divide
 In two slow rivers, that the crimson blood
 Circles her body in on every side,
 Who like a late-sack'd island vastly stood
 Bare and unpeopled in this fearful flood.
 Some of her blood still pure and red remain'd,
 And some look'd black, and that false Tarquin stain'd. (ll. 1737-43)

Emblems, as "speaking pictures," are generally constructed as an inert image explicated by a printed text; this, however, is an emblem *in vivo*. In her exploration of humoral theory in the animal realm, Gail Kern Paster notes that black blood is indicative of melancholy. While Paster analyzes the melancholy cat as her example, *The Rape of Lucrece* reaches further down the chain of being, proffering the corpse as a sentient being and moral agent that embodies its mistress's melancholy. (We might remember a similar agency and expressiveness in the behavior of Henry VI's corpse at the commencement of *Richard III*.) Lucrece's emblematic body, with the blood divided into two streams by the knife that took her life, not only represents her existential condition—as a "wracked," "unpeopled" island—but also expresses Lucrece's self-assessment that she is both innocent and tainted.

In effect, the interaction between eloquent corpse and witnessing narrator reproduces and extends the cycle of borrowing and lending initiated by Lucrece and Hecuba. Hecuba, like the body of Lucrece, initially appears as a grotesque:

In her the painter had anatomiz'd
 Time's ruin, beauty's wrack, and grim care's reign;
 Her cheeks with chops and wrinkles were disguis'd:
 Of what she was no semblance did remain.
 Her blue blood chang'd to black in every vein,
 Wanting the spring that those shrunk pipes had fed,
 Show'd life imprison'd in a body dead. (ll. 1450-56)

With a sight this shocking and degraded, possibilities for political misrecognition abound, yet the stanza offers hope of renewal amid death and destruction. This emblem of Hecuba as a ruin, her blue blood changed to black, is in rhetorical dialogue with the speaking picture of Lucrece's corpse, with its heraldic rivers of red and black blood. Together, the painter, narrator, and Lucrece give new life to the walking anatomy that once was Hecuba. The cycle begins again as the narrator and corpse act in concert to emblemize Lucrece as moral agent. Perhaps, if Samuel Arkin is correct, the circle of borrowing and lending will widen even further to induce sympathy in the Roman people who behold that corpse and who must give their consent for justice to be enacted against the Tarquins.

Postscript: *Hamlet's* Hecuba

When Hecuba is invoked again in the Player's speech from *Hamlet*, she and her milieu are a discarded relic from the historical and literary past. Hecuba watches the desecration of her husband Priam's body in agonized silence. According to the Player's familiar text,

But if the gods themselves did see her then
When she saw Pyrrhus make malicious sport
In mincing with his sword her husband's limbs,
The *instant burst of clamour that she made* –
Unless things mortal move them not at all –
Would have made milch the burning eyes of heaven,
And passion in the gods.' (*Hamlet*, 2:2:492-98; emphasis added)

The substance of this speech clearly harkens back in its diction to the *ekphrasis* from *Lucrece*. But in the later iteration, Hecuba's complaint is never enunciated and her pleas go unheeded. Borrowing looks and lending words has lost its power to cultivate recognition through rhetoric. What is left, as *Hamlet* and *Hamlet* discover, is only revenge. We have come full circle.

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