

## MACHIAVELLI AND THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA

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**Abstract:** The rape and suicide of Lucretia is one of the most prominent motifs in early Roman historiography. A prelude to the revolution that overthrew the Tarquins and transformed Rome into a republic, the episode was narrated and examined by Roman historians, medieval philosophers and Renaissance humanists. Unlike his Roman and Renaissance sources, Machiavelli downplays the rape and suicide, denying the causal role in the revolution that his predecessors had routinely attributed to it. This dismissal of Lucretia's rape and suicide is surprising both in view of the importance Machiavelli accords to public spectacles of violence in founding political institutions and because the case of Lucretia appears to corroborate his persistent warning to princes to abstain from sexually assaulting their subject women. This article examines the reasons behind Machiavelli's sceptical attitude towards Lucretia and argues that the refusal to extol Lucretia as a republican hero stems from his rejection of a central ethical premise and rhetorical trope of republicanism: the idea that sexual virtue is a synecdoche for political virtue.

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[T]his same love of liberty once incited the Roman people against royal tyranny and led them to abolish monarchy and the rule of the decemvirs, the former on account of the rape of Lucretia and the latter on account of the injustice suffered by Virginia.<sup>3</sup>

Someone perhaps will doubt whence it arose that of many changes that are made from free life to tyrannical, and to the contrary, some of them are made with blood, some without; for as is understood through the histories, in similar variations sometimes infinite men have been put to death, sometimes no one has been injured. That came about in the change that Rome made from kings to consuls, where none other than the Tarquins were expelled, with no offense to anyone else.<sup>4</sup>

Lucretia's suicide had no more than a symbolic value.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Coluccio Salutati, 'To the Romans', in *Political Writings*, ed. Stefano U. Baldassarri, trans. Rolf Bagemihl (Cambridge MA, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago, 1996) (hereafter *Discourses*), 3.7.

<sup>5</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevalier (New York, 2011), p. 150.

The legend of Lucretia — her rape and subsequent suicide — is one of the most prominent motifs in early Roman history. As a prelude to the revolution that deposed the Etruscan kings and transformed Rome from a monarchy into a republic, the episode is one of the founding myths of republicanism.<sup>6</sup> It broaches themes of sexual and political violence, power and tyranny, gendered notions of virtue and chastity, the ethics of suicide, and the politics of popular revolt. A favourite theme in classical through to early modern European cultural history, the Lucretia story has been extensively treated among others by Livy, Ovid, Tertullian, Augustine, Chaucer, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Salutati, Pizan and Shakespeare, not to mention the numerous depictions in Renaissance to Baroque painting.

Unlike his Roman, medieval and Renaissance sources, Machiavelli dismisses the role of Lucretia in the overthrow of the Tarquins and in founding the Roman republic. This is surprising for a number of reasons. In Renaissance Italy, Lucretia's rape and suicide were part of the anti-tyrannical iconography of civic humanism and republicanism. To the extent that Machiavelli shares these anti-tyrannical commitments, one might expect him to draw on the myth to make his case for republican freedom. Further, Machiavelli accords tremendous importance to displays of public violence in the founding of political institutions.<sup>7</sup> What are readers to make of the fact that while he frequently invokes the expulsion of the Tarquins, he systematically downplays Lucretia's role in the uprising against the monarchy? Finally, Machiavelli consistently highlights the proclivity of tyrants to sexually assault their subject women, something he regards as one of the greatest political liabilities and perils for princes. Does not Lucretia's case serve as a perfect example of the political danger that sexual assault and misconduct poses to princes?

I argue that there is a tension between Machiavelli's theoretical commitments and his treatment of Lucretia. This article seeks to illuminate and explain this tension from both a conceptual and a historical perspective. Machiavelli's disavowal of Lucretia's rape and suicide raises questions about

<sup>6</sup> See Stephanie H. Jed, *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism* (Bloomington, 1989); Melissa M. Matthes, *The Rape of Lucretia and the Founding of Republics* (University Park PA, 2000); Coppélia Kahn, 'Lucrece: The Sexual Politics of Subjectivity', in *Rape and Representation*, ed. Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (New York, 1991), p. 141. On the history of the myth, see Hans Galinsky, *Der Lucretia-Stoff in der Weltliteratur* (Breslau, 1932); Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and Its Transformation* (Oxford, 1982); Reinhard Klecszewski, 'Wandlungen des Lucretia-Bildes im lateinischen Mittelalter und in der italienischen Literatur der Renaissance', in *Livius, Werk und Rezeption: Festschrift für Erich Burck zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Eckhard Lefèvre and Eckhart Olshausen (Munich, 1983); Eleanor Glendinning, 'Reinventing Lucretia: Rape, Suicide and Redemption From Classical Antiquity to the Medieval Era', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 20 (1/2) (2013).

<sup>7</sup> See Yves Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence* (Cambridge and New York, 2018), esp. pp. 34–65, 111–40.

the political status and meaning of sexual and gender-based violence in his work. What are the norms whereby some formations of violence are recognized and celebrated as political whereas others are trivialized? How does Machiavelli conceptualize rape? Under what conditions — if at all — do forms of violence that are sexual and gender-based have a political valence? What are the implications of the Lucretia story for women's political status in Machiavelli's political thought more generally? What is the relation between sexual and political virtue both in republics and in principalities?

Sexism or misogyny are obvious candidates for explaining Machiavelli's dismissal of Lucretia's historical role, but as I argue below, they fall short. Moreover, from a feminist perspective, it is not obvious that idolizing Lucretia for her suicide is any less patriarchal or misogynist than relegating this particular founding myth to the scrap yard of history.

This article consists of five parts. The first section reconstructs Machiavelli's political conception of rape; the second section introduces the Lucretia myth and develops the interpretive puzzle of Machiavelli's marginalization of Lucretia's role; the third and fourth sections offer an interpretation for this disavowal; and the fifth section complicates the interpretation of the *Discourses* through a consideration of Machiavelli's comedy *Mandragola*.

## I

### Machiavelli's Political Analysis of Rape

Machiavelli lacks an explicit concept of rape or sexual assault. Rape falls under the broader category of 'injury' [*ingiura*], and it registers as a political concern only under very specific conditions, namely when perpetrated by someone in a position of political or economic power. In the *Discourses*, he relates the story of Pausanias, a young nobleman at the court of Philip of Macedon who was gang-raped by Attalus, one of the king's confidants. At a banquet, Pausanias was 'taken and brought bound, and [Attalus] not only vented his own lust by force, but also for greater ignominy [*ignominia*] had him reproached in a similar mode by many of the others'.<sup>8</sup> Pausanias, Machiavelli writes, 'complained of this injury often to Philip', but he was ignored. Instead of punishing Attalus, the Macedonian king promoted him, awarding him the governorship of a province. When Pausanias realized that Philip had no intention to redress the crime committed against him, he assassinated the king on the morning of his daughter's wedding.

The conclusion Machiavelli draws from this story is that a ruler 'should never esteem a man so little that he believes that when he adds injury on top of injury, he who is injured will not think of avenging himself with every danger and particular harm for himself'.<sup>9</sup> The political lesson, in other words, is not

<sup>8</sup> *Discourses*, 2.28.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

about rape but about the political cost to princes of failing to administer justice. What is notable about Pausanias is that he killed not his rapist but the king who forsook his responsibility to punish Attalus. The wrong Pausanias suffers at the hands of his assailant is dishonour — *ignominia* — yet what drives Pausanias to murder is not his violation or the dishonour he experienced but the king's failure to avenge the crime.

Machiavelli says that the Pausanias episode is 'very similar to that of the Romans', a point to which I will return below. For now, what we can take away from the story is that even though Machiavelli lacks a specific concept of rape, sexual assault is recognizable to him, both as intrinsic injury and as a potential risk to ruling elites. The political repercussions of rape are also emphasized in *The Prince*, which repeatedly warns rulers against taking sexual advantage of their subjects. Chapter 17 suggests that a prince can be feared without being hated so long as he abstains 'from the property of his citizens and his subjects, and from their women [*si astenga da la roba de' sua cittadini e de' sua sudditi e da le donne loro*]'. Machiavelli does not specify who 'their women' are and what sort of kinship relations are designated by the possessive pronoun 'their'. What is clear, however, is that women and property are red lines: expropriations and violations of sexual propriety are in a category that is exempt from Machiavelli's otherwise liberal endorsement of violence.

Whereas the admonition not to touch subjects' women is ostensibly self-evident, the warning not to confiscate subjects' property is rationalized as follows: a prince must sometimes kill his enemies, yet 'above all, he must abstain from the property of others, because men forget the death of a father more quickly than the loss of a patrimony'.<sup>10</sup> This scandalous claim — that it is more prudent to assassinate someone's father than to confiscate their patrimony — further complicates the status of rape. Is a prince's assault on a woman akin to a seizure of property that will not be forgotten? Or are women subsumed under the category of patrimony? Are men more likely to forget the murder of their fathers, because they are intrinsically acquisitive and more attached to material wealth than to kinship bonds? If so, what makes the kinship bonds to 'their women' different from the ones to their fathers?

Machiavelli offers no answers to these questions, but to make sure his readers heed the warning, he repeats it a few pages later, in the opening lines of Chapter 19, 'Of Avoiding Contempt and Hatred'. There he writes:

What makes [the prince] hated above all, as I said, is to be rapacious and a usurper of the property and the women of his subjects [*essere rapace e usurpatore della roba e delle donne de' sudditi*]. From these he must abstain, and whenever one does not take away either the property or honour from the generality of men [*alle universalità delli uomini non si toglie né*

<sup>10</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago, 1998) (hereafter *The Prince*), 17.

*onore né roba*], they live content and one has only to combat the ambitions of the few [*de' pochi*] . . .

This passage addresses some of the uncertainties from the earlier chapter. In Chapter 19, Machiavelli distinguishes between the desires of the many (the 'generality of men') and the few: whereas the many will not encroach on the prince's domain so long as he leaves alone their property and their honour, the few are intrinsically ambitious and domineering. A prudent prince should build alliances with the many rather than trust elites. Because of their ambition, the few cannot be satisfied 'with decency and without injury to others, but one can satisfy the people; for the end of the people is more decent [*onesto*] than that of the *grandi*, since the *grandi* want to oppress and the people want not to be oppressed'.<sup>11</sup> The warning to princes, not to touch their subjects' women is thus an element of Machiavelli's justification for his preferred regime type in *The Prince* — a civil principality, i.e. a principality with popular support. Women, in this chapter, are subsumed under the category of men's honour and thus separate (albeit analogous) to property. By figuring honour as the attribute of men who protect their female kin, Machiavelli points to the politically charged nature of patriarchal sexual protocols.<sup>12</sup>

That it is not women *per se* who pose political danger but men's honour and desire is also the upshot of the notorious chapter of the *Discourses* titled 'How a State is Ruined Because of Women'.<sup>13</sup> That chapter argues (confusingly) that women have often been the cause of a state's ruin, only to cite as examples cases that do not substantiate this point. Machiavelli asserts that 'women have been causes of much ruin and have done great harm to those who govern a city, and have caused many divisions in them', but the examples do not support his case. As evidence for the claim that women wreck states, Machiavelli cites an incident in the ancient town of Ardea, where a quarrel over a young woman led to civil war between patricians and plebeians. Yet as both Livy and Machiavelli tell the story, the struggle between patricians and plebeians was at best *triggered* by the dispute over this young woman but in no sense *caused* by her.<sup>14</sup> The remaining historical evidence Machiavelli cites similarly contradicts his explicit claim that women spoil states. He mentions Lucretia and Virginia as cases in which violations of women have cost rulers their power and authority.<sup>15</sup> Yet both cases are instances not of women ruining states but of princes losing popular support on account of sexual crimes. In

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>12</sup> See also *Discourses* 3.6: 'Of honours taken away from men, that concerning women is most important; after this, contempt of one's person.'

<sup>13</sup> *Discourses* 3.26.

<sup>14</sup> Titus Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (London, 2002), 4.9.

<sup>15</sup> To this effect, Machiavelli also cites Aristotle — one of the very few places in his work where he does so. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1314b27, see also 1311a35–39, 1303b17–27.

fact, the upshot of all the examples and citations offered in *Discourses* 3.26 is that the danger women pose to states lies not in their potential *actions* but in their *objectification* and in the competition among potential suitors. Thus, the causes of states' ruin must be sought in male desire, in breaches of sexual protocol, in pre-existing factions, and in tyrannical conditions. States are ruined, in other words, because of divisions and conflict (including class conflict) and because of corruption that is sometimes manifest in men's inability to control their sexual desire.

In sum, Machiavelli operates with a patriarchal conception of rape as a crime against honour. When men are raped, as in the case of Pausanias, it is their honour that is violated. When women are raped, as in the admonitions in *The Prince* and in the passages in the *Discourses*, the honour that is compromised is that of their kinsmen. The asymmetry suggests that rape represents a *pro tanto* injury only when done to men but not to women. A woman's rape amounts to injury only if inflicted by an unauthorized party, in which case it constitutes an act of usurpation. The paradigm of rape that informs this logic centres not on unwanted sex and on survivors' intimate integrity but on what Catharine MacKinnon calls a 'male-defined loss [. . .] of exclusive access'. Such definitions of rape treat women's sexuality as something that is exchanged, protected or stolen by men but never owned or possessed by women.<sup>16</sup>

It is obvious that this notion of rape is both conceptually and normatively deficient; yet, even on such a thin notion of rape, the case of Lucretia ought to register as an instance of injury, if only against her male kinfolk. The next section outlines the context and the traditional account of the legend and develops the puzzle of Machiavelli's silence.

## II

### The Legend of Lucretia

According to legend, Rome became a republic in 509 BCE, when a popular uprising deposed the seventh Etruscan king of Rome, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud) who had reigned since 535 BCE. The uprising was precipitated by the rape and suicide of Lucretia, a beautiful and virtuous Roman matron who was raped by the king's son, Sextus Tarquinius. The earliest surviving account of the myth are Diodorus Siculus's and Livy's, both penned in the first century BCE. But the legend is much older, having been treated by the earliest Roman historiographer, Fabius Pictor, in the second century BCE.<sup>17</sup> The story is replicated in the works of a number of ancient writers, including Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Ovid and Valerius Maximus within a few decades of Livy, and by Plutarch, Florus and Dio Cassius over

<sup>16</sup> Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Cambridge MA, 1989), p. 173.

<sup>17</sup> R.M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy: Books 1–5* (Oxford, 1965), p. 218.

the course of the following two centuries.<sup>18</sup> My interpretation draws primarily on Livy because he is Machiavelli's most significant source.<sup>19</sup>

As Livy tells the story, Sextus first encounters Lucretia in the context of a chastity competition, which involves three husbands squabbling over whose wife is the most beautiful and pure.<sup>20</sup> Rome is at war with Ardea, the very same town that six decades later erupts into civil war over the body of a young woman. During the siege, in between military activities, three 'young princes' get into a drunken rivalry over which of them has the best wife.<sup>21</sup> To settle the issue, they decide to ride to Rome to surprise their wives to see what they are up to. On arriving at dusk, they find that their wives spend their time in a very similar manner as they do: they luxuriate and get drunk at dinner parties. The exception is Lucretia, the wife of the king's nephew, whom they find virtuously at home, spinning yarn and surrounded by her maidservants.

Aroused by her 'beauty and proven chastity', Sextus returns to Lucretia's house a few days later, where he is hospitably received, and that night enters her room with his sword drawn. Unfazed by the fear of death, Lucretia rebuffs him until Sextus threatens to not only kill her but soil her name by planting compromising evidence. 'If death will not move you' Sextus cried, 'dishonour shall. I will kill you first, then cut the throat of a slave and lay his naked body by your side'.<sup>22</sup> The prospect of being suspected of adultery leads Lucretia to surrender to Sextus, but in order to prove her sexual virtue, she later commits suicide. Having invited her father and her husband, each accompanied by a friend, she draws a knife and before plunging it into her heart, announces dramatically: 'I am innocent of fault, but I will take my punishment. Never shall Lucretia provide a precedent for unchaste women to

<sup>18</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, Vol. 4, trans. C.H. Oldfather (Cambridge MA, 1946), 10.20; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, trans. Earnest Cary (Cambridge MA, 1937–50), 4.64–4.85; Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. James George Frazer (Cambridge MA, 1931), 2.684–856; Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge MA, 2000), 6.1; Plutarch, 'Publicola', in *Lives*, Vol. 1, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge MA, 1914), 1.3–1.5; Lucius Annaeus Florus, *Epitome of Roman History*, trans. E.S. Forster (Cambridge MA, 1984), 1.7–9; Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Vol. 1, trans. Earnest Cary and Herbert B. Foster (Cambridge MA, 1914), 2.13.

<sup>19</sup> It is also the case that classicists regard Livy's version as an artistic masterpiece. See P.G. Walsh, *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 214–18; Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy*, p. 219; S.N. Philippides, 'Narrative Strategies and Ideology in Livy's "Rape of Lucretia"', *Helios*, 10 (7) (1983), p. 113; Hermann Tränkle, 'Der Anfang des Römischen Freistaats in der Darstellung des Livius', *Hermes*, 93 (3) (1965), p. 312.

<sup>20</sup> Livy, *Early History of Rome*, 1.56–59.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.57.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.58.

escape what they deserve'.<sup>23</sup> Brutus, Lucretia's husband's friend, pulls the bloody knife from her chest and exclaims that he will not rest until the Tarquins are overthrown.

Brutus then goes on to instigate a revolution against the monarchy. He galvanizes his audience with a graphic speech evoking the royal family's rapacity and Lucretia's pitiful death. As Livy writes, '[t]he effect of his words was immediate: the populace took fire and were brought to demand the abrogation of the king's authority and the exile of himself and his family'.<sup>24</sup> The Tarquins are forced out of the city by the rebellion and instead of the king, two consuls are elected by popular vote: they are Collatinus, Lucretia's husband, and Brutus, her avenger.

The third book of Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* is dedicated to the actions of individual men who 'made Rome great' [*uomini particolari facessono grande Roma*].<sup>25</sup> Lucretia, needless to say, is not included among them, yet Brutus, whom Machiavelli calls 'father of Roman liberty' is the archetype of such great men.<sup>26</sup> A year after the overthrow of the Tarquins — all according to Livy's report — while Brutus serves as Rome's first consul, his two sons, along with other young aristocrats, are involved in a conspiracy against the republic. These nobles yearn for the monarchy, because of the privileges they used to enjoy. Yet the plotters are discovered and convicted of high treason. As consul, it is Brutus's task to execute his own sons. Livy describes the scene as a collective tremor, with great anguish and pity for everyone involved. (Plutarch disagrees, portraying Brutus as unflinching and stern as he watches his sons' beheading, but Machiavelli ignores Plutarch's version).<sup>27</sup>

Machiavelli frequently invokes Brutus as a model for how to found a state. New states, Machiavelli writes, have partisan enemies, and to deal with these adversaries 'there is no remedy more powerful, nor more valid, more secure, and more necessary, than to kill the sons of Brutus'.<sup>28</sup> Political transitions, 'either

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.59.

<sup>25</sup> *Discourses* 3.1.

<sup>26</sup> For illuminating analyses of Machiavelli's rendition of Brutus, see Victoria Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric: From the Counter-Reformation to Milton* (Princeton NJ, 1994), pp. 55–8; Miguel E. Vatter, *Between Form and Event: Machiavelli's Theory of Political Freedom* (Dordrecht, 2000), pp. 89–94. John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge, 2011), pp. 126–7, 133–4; Hanna F. Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley, 1999), pp. 59–63; Catherine Zuckert, 'Machiavelli's Democratic Republic', *History of Political Thought*, 35 (2) (2014). Martinez argues — implausibly in my view — that by celebrating Brutus, 'Lucretia's final lover and her true spiritual offspring' Machiavelli effectively treats her as the 'true founder of the city'. Ronald L. Martinez, 'The Pharmacy of Machiavelli: Roman Lucretia in "Mandragola"', *Renaissance Drama*, 14 (1983), p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> Plutarch, 'Publicola', in *Lives*, Vol. 1, trans. Perrin, 6.3–6.4.

<sup>28</sup> *Discourses* 1.16.



from a republic to tyranny or from tyranny to republic' require 'a memorable execution against the enemies of present conditions'. Hence 'it is necessary' as Machiavelli writes in the title of one of his discourses 'to kill the sons of Brutus if one wishes to maintain a newly acquired freedom'.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, to 'kill the sons of Brutus' is short hand for a form of virtuous violence Machiavelli considers essential for regenerating and revitalizing political orders.

Part of what makes Brutus's execution of his sons so grim and memorable is the asymmetry between the punishment of the Tarquins — they were merely exiled — and that meted out to the young conspirators. Exile, Machiavelli intimates, perhaps reflecting Florence's long and failed experience with exiling conspirators and political enemies (including for a brief time Cosimo de' Medici) — is not an adequate sanction for traitors. Like the Medici who throughout the fifteenth century expanded the role of capital punishment as a sanction for political crimes, Machiavelli argues that executions are more effective punishments than exile.

By executing the consul's children, the first act of the republic consists in undoing the very principles of monarchic political order. Roman monarchy was never hereditary; so removing the conditions for the hereditary organization of power and authority was not a relevant symbolic aspect of this execution for Livy and his Roman readers. Yet for sixteenth-century Florence, dominated by a single family on its way to instituting a hereditary principate, 'to kill the sons of Brutus' has an obviously anti-hereditary ring. Brutus's sons stand for the kind of corruption that comes with power and privilege passed through families and bloodlines, in other words, precisely the kind of power that had become so corrosive of Florentine politics throughout the fifteenth century. To kill Brutus's sons strikes at the heart of the principle of birthright, at the monarchic and aristocratic notion that (male) kinship is the rightful conveyor of authority and privilege.

The contrast between Machiavelli's celebration of Brutus and his omission of Lucretia is most conspicuous in *Discourses* 3.7, in the passage cited as one of the epigraphs to this article. There, Machiavelli suggests that while some constitutional changes are violent and bloody, others are not. As an example, he adduces the revolution that transformed Rome from a monarchy to a republic, in which, he insists, nobody was injured apart from the Tarquins.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.3.

<sup>30</sup> Coby, Saxonhouse and Smith note that Machiavelli plays down Lucretia's rape and suicide but offer no interpretation of that move. J. Patrick Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans: Liberty and Greatness in the Discourses on Livy* (Lanham MD, 1999), p. 292 n.21; Arlene W. Saxonhouse, 'Women as Men, Men as Women, and the Ambiguity of Sex', in *Feminist Interpretations of Niccolò Machiavelli*, ed. Maria J. Falco (University Park PA, 2004), p. 162; Steven B. Smith, 'Machiavelli's Mandragola and the Protean Self', in *Modernity and Its Discontents: Making and Unmaking the Bourgeois From Machiavelli to Bellow* (New Haven, 2016), pp. 33–5.

Someone perhaps will doubt whence it arose that of many changes that are made from free life to tyrannical, and to the contrary, some of them are made with blood, some without; for as is understood through the histories, in similar variations sometimes infinite men have been put to death, sometimes no one has been injured. That came about in the change that Rome made from kings to consuls, where none other than the Tarquins were expelled, with no offense to anyone else.<sup>31</sup>

The claim that the Roman revolution involved ‘no offense to anyone else [*fuora della offensione di qualunque altro*]’ denies both the political relevance of Lucretia’s rape as well as her political agency in committing suicide. In so doing, Machiavelli bluntly challenges the conventional narratives of this episode, most of which highlight the rape and suicide.<sup>32</sup>

Ancient sources including Livy, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Ovid and early Christian authors such as Jerome and Tertullian all extol Lucretia’s act as heroic.<sup>33</sup> Cicero draws on the Lucretia story to validate his argument for a timeless and divine moral law and to refute the Epicurean exoneration of desire.<sup>34</sup> Dante lists Lucretia among the ‘great spirits’, a group that includes Hector and Aeneas, Plato and Socrates, as well as Brutus.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, Augustine is more sceptical than previous commentators, noting the dilemma that Lucretia’s suicide poses for Christians who regard suicide as sinful: ‘For if she is acquitted of murder, she is convicted of adultery; and if she is acquitted of adultery, then she is convicted of murder [. . .] One can only ask: If she was an adulteress, why is she praised? If she was pure, why was she slain?’<sup>36</sup>

The Lucretia myth went through a veritable revival in Renaissance Florence. It was a cornerstone of Francesco Petrararch’s fourteenth-century reimagination of Roman mythology, history, literature and poetry.<sup>37</sup> Italian humanists were preoccupied with Lucretia, not only because their literary,

<sup>31</sup> *Discourses* 3.7.

<sup>32</sup> For detailed discussions, see Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia*; Jan Follak, ‘Lucretia zwischen positiver und negativer Anthropologie: Coluccio Salutati’s *Declamatio Lucretie* und die Menschenbilder im *exemplum* der Lucretia von der Antike bis in die Neuzeit’ (PhD dissertation, University of Konstanz, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> See Livy, *Early History of Rome*, 1.56–59; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 4.64–4.85; Ovid, *Fasti*, 2.684–856; Jerome, *Against Jovinianus*, 1.49; Tertullian, *Ad Martyras, On Exhortation to Chastity; On Monogamy*.

<sup>34</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Legibus* 2.10, in *On the Commonwealth and on the Laws*, trans. James E.G. Zetzel (Cambridge, 1999); Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Finibus / On Ends*, trans. H. Harris Rackham (Cambridge MA, 1931), 2.20.66.

<sup>35</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Inferno, Vol. 1 Part 1*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (Princeton NJ, 1990), 4.127–134.

<sup>36</sup> Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge, 1998), 1.19.

<sup>37</sup> Petrarch explores the Lucretia motif in four of his major works and arguably exceeds even Livy in the way he invests Lucretia with heroic status. Francesco Petrarca, *The Canzoniere, or Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*, trans. Mark Musa, ed. Mark Musa

aesthetic and moral compass pointed to ancient Rome, but also because they regarded Florence as a successor of Rome, a second Rome, heir to its liberty and glory and destined to replicate its greatness.<sup>38</sup> For Petrarch and his humanist students, the revival of the Roman tradition involved a comprehensive programme of fashioning Roman virtues, values and traditions for their Italian contemporaries. With its condensation of moral and political allegories, the Lucretia story lends itself uniquely to this project. Accordingly, the Lucretia motif was taken up by Renaissance poets from Fazio degli Uberti through Giovanni Boccaccio to Matteo Bandello along with various anonymous authors;<sup>39</sup> by fifteenth- and sixteenth-century painters like Botticelli, Titian and Veronese; and it was a popular subject in Renaissance Tuscan domestic painting, such as on wedding chests and wall panels.<sup>40</sup> The most extensive discussion is in a widely circulated text written by the Florentine humanist and chancellor of the republic Coluccio Salutati: his *Declamatio Lucretiae*.

Salutati's *Declamatio* consists of a dramatic exchange of speeches between Lucretia, her father and her husband, in which the men seek to persuade Lucretia that she committed no wrong and that her chastity is beyond reproach. In doing so, they emphasize the violence and viciousness of Tarquin's act and character: 'Are not the cruelty of the father [*crudelitas patris*] and the monstrosity of his children [*immanitas filiorum*] well known to you?'<sup>41</sup> In their efforts to persuade Lucretia of her innocence, her father and husband stress that it is Sextus alone who was violent and that Lucretia's soul remained 'most chaste during the violence of copulation [*mentem intra concubitus violentiam pudicissimam conservasti*]' . Yet Lucretia refuses to budge, arguing that only suicide can restore her honour, because it will prove that she prefers to die chaste than to live as an adulteress. In return, she demands that her husband

and Barbara Manfredi (Bloomington, 1999), 260.9, 262.9–11, 360.97–100; Francesco Petrarca, 'The Triumph of Chastity', in *Petrarch in English*, trans. Anna Hume, ed. Thomas P. Roche (London, 2005); Francesco Petrarca, *De viris illustribus*, ed. Guido Martellotti (Florence, 1964); Francesco Petrarca, *L'Africa*, ed. Nicola Festa (Florence, 1926), 3.643–802.

<sup>38</sup> See for example Leonardo Bruni, 'Panegyric to the City of Florence', in *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society*, trans. Benjamin G. Kohl, ed. Benjamin G. Kohl, Ronald G. Witt and Elizabeth B. Welles (Philadelphia, 1978), p. 149.

<sup>39</sup> Fazio degli Uberti, *Il Dittamondo e le Rime* (Bari, 1952), Vol. 1, p. 59; Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women*, ed. Virginia Brown (Cambridge MA, 2001), pp. 96–8. On Bandello as well as the anonymous novellas, see Galinsky, *Der Lucretia-Stoff in der Weltliteratur*, pp. 81–9.

<sup>40</sup> Cristelle L. Baskins, 'Corporeal Authority in the Speaking Picture: The Representation of Lucretia in Tuscan Domestic Painting', in *Gender Rhetorics: Postures of Dominance and Submission in History*, ed. Richard C. Trexler (Binghamton NY, 1994).

<sup>41</sup> Coluccio Salutati, 'Declamatio Lucretiae: Facsimile, Transcription, and Translation', in Jed, *Chaste Thinking*, p. 149.

and father avenge her violation ‘by the sword’, insisting that it is ‘your responsibility, if there is anything in you of Roman spirit, to avenge such a crime’.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, in Salutati’s version, Lucretia presents her courage as a model for the men to emulate.

Salutati’s *Declamatio* was wildly popular and scholars regard it as perhaps his most influential text.<sup>43</sup> Salutati’s glorification of Lucretia remained so prominent during Machiavelli’s lifetime that even Cardinal Giovanni de’Medici, Lorenzo de’Medici’s son and the later pope Leo X, penned a poem about Lucretia, in which he largely followed Salutati’s narrative.<sup>44</sup> Machiavelli was no doubt well-acquainted with the various treatments of the Lucretia myth in ancient and early modern texts. The contrast between the significance attributed to Lucretia’s rape and suicide in the literature and Machiavelli’s attempt to repudiate it is therefore all the more notable. Indeed, Machiavelli’s assertion that the Roman revolt against the Tarquins involved ‘no offense to anyone else’ appears to be a direct riposte to the weight Salutati assigns to Tarquin’s violence and cruelty.

But why is Machiavelli so concerned to minimize that violence? Would not the violation of Lucretia be a prime example of precisely the kind of abuse that Machiavelli regards as most damaging and harmful to political authority and stability, namely sexual transgressions?<sup>45</sup> If the Pausanias story is indeed ‘very similar to that of the Romans’ (i.e. to Lucretia), shouldn’t readers grasp the rape of Lucretia as a quintessential moment of the sort of rapacity that undoes states?<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Machiavelli appears to recognize just that, for he mentions Lucretia in the chapter in the *Discourses* on how women ruin states. There he writes that ‘the excess done against Lucretia took the state away from the Tarquins’,<sup>47</sup> directly contradicting the earlier claim that Tarquin the Proud ‘was expelled *not because his son Sextus had raped Lucretia* but because he had broken the laws of the kingdom and governed it tyrannically’.<sup>48</sup> Was it the crime against Lucretia that brought about the Tarquins’ downfall or was it the royals’ general lawlessness and tyranny of which Lucretia was but an epiphenomenon? If Lucretia’s rape was not the cause for the expulsion of the Tarquins, Hanna Pitkin asks impatiently,

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>43</sup> Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (Princeton NJ, 1966), p. 115; Jed, *Chaste Thinking*, p. 38.

<sup>44</sup> There is no critical edition of Giovanni de’Medici’s poem, ‘*In Lucretiam statuum*’. The text can be found in William Roscoe’s nineteenth-century biography of Leo X. It is reproduced and discussed in Follak, ‘Lucretia zwischen positiver und negativer Anthropologie’, pp. 61–4.

<sup>45</sup> *The Prince* 17, 19; *Discourses* 3.6.

<sup>46</sup> *Discourses* 2.28.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.26.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.5, my emphasis.

'[w]hy, then, does he cite her as an example of feminine danger? Is she an agent of history or not?'<sup>49</sup>

### III

#### Interpreting Machiavelli's Silence

Pitkin's question of whether Lucretia is 'an agent of history or not' may not be the most productive way to approach Machiavelli's silence. Of course she is an agent in the standard philosophical sense that her actions are intentional, deliberate and performed for reasons. But what Pitkin aims at — whether Lucretia's rape and suicide are historical causes for the expulsion of the Tarquins — has little to do with her status as agent. True, in the context of the putative danger women pose to states,<sup>50</sup> Machiavelli is willing to concede the symbolic function of rape that he denies in the discussion of republican foundings.<sup>51</sup> Yet even in *Discourses* 3.26, it is not Lucretia's suicidal *action* that makes her a relevant figure but rather the 'excess done against' her [*lo eccesso fatto contro a Lucrezia*]. In other words, even when Machiavelli does acknowledge Lucretia's role, it is only as a *patient* and not as an *agent* of history in the strong sense. To recognize Lucretia as more than a victim, to consider her as an agent who successfully dramatizes her victimization and performs her suicide to launch an anti-royalist uprising would have required Machiavelli to see in rape more than just a violation of male honour. That he was unable to do so is a direct function of his gendered conception of politics. But can this gendered conception of politics also explain why *even as a victim*, Lucretia is repeatedly marginalized in Machiavelli's narrative of the Roman republican founding?

Dead and violated female bodies are a common literary and artistic trope, and Machiavelli is not above exploiting such imagery in his own texts.<sup>52</sup> Why not Lucretia? What is the meaning of Machiavelli's disavowal of Lucretia's rape and suicide? Why does he deny the historical and political significance of the scene that, according to the patriarchal conventions of republican historiography, inaugurates the Roman republic?

One way to approach these questions is through the place of gender in Machiavelli's work more broadly. Along these lines, one might say that, given the ubiquity of rape narratives in republican foundings, the omission of Lucretia's role is simply a function of Machiavelli's overall gendered conception of politics. From the passage in *Discourses* 3.7, which claims that the

<sup>49</sup> Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman*, p. 112.

<sup>50</sup> *Discourses* 3.26.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.5; 3.7.

<sup>52</sup> See for instance the 'Tercets on Ambition', in Niccolò Machiavelli, *Chief Works, and Others*, trans. Allan H. Gilbert (Durham NC, 1989) (hereafter *Chief Works*) 738. On the topological status of women's bodies, see Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester, 1992).

Roman revolution injured none but the Tarquins, it is clear that Lucretia does not count as ‘anyone else [*qualunque altro*]’; her injury is not legible as politically or historically relevant. By denying her status as *qualunque altro*, Machiavelli codifies her rape as private, unpolitical and historically trivial. By depoliticizing the rape as well as Lucretia’s subsequent suicide, Machiavelli denies Lucretia the recognition of being one of the *uomini particolari* who made Rome great. In so doing, he tacitly renders the republican political space masculine, excluding women from citizenship in what Susan Okin and Carole Pateman have identified as the conventional mechanism in the discourse of Western political thought.<sup>53</sup> Okin and Pateman have demonstrated that incorporating women into the political sphere is not simply a matter of modifying the vocabulary and using gender-inclusive language, for in many instances, the internal logic of political space, the authority and community articulated by canonical thinkers become incoherent if rehearsed through a female subject position. This point applies *a fortiori*, if, as is the case with Machiavelli, rape narratives are an unavowed subtext of the celebrated founding stories.

Yet this gloss is unsatisfactory for a couple of different reasons. First, explaining the exclusion of the rape scene as a function of Machiavelli’s general misogyny implies that the representation of rape in historical narrative and founding myths is somehow a more progressive, more gender-egalitarian and less patriarchal stance. Yet, as I will argue more fully below, it is not at all clear that narrations of rape and suicide as founding stories are more feminist than their disavowal. Second, the place of violence against women in Machiavelli’s work is more complicated than simply that of an elision designed to keep woman out of the political world.

To be sure, there is evidence for the claim that Machiavelli systematically excludes women from the political world. To cite but the most famous example, the lines in Chapter 25 of *The Prince*, that ‘fortune is a woman; and it is necessary, if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down’ obviously evoke the fantasy of forcing women into submission.<sup>54</sup> Excerpts such as these may plausibly lead a reader to conclude that the eroticization of male dominance defines Machiavelli’s category of political action.<sup>55</sup> But as feminist critics, and above all Pitkin, have shown, a comprehensive analysis of the *oeuvre* reveals a much more anxious and ambivalent perspective on

<sup>53</sup> Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton NJ, 1979); Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism, and Political Theory* (Stanford, 1990).

<sup>54</sup> Juliana Schiesari, ‘Libidinal Economies: Machiavelli and Fortune’s Rape’, in *Desire in the Renaissance: Psychoanalysis and Literature*, ed. Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz (Princeton NJ, 1994).

<sup>55</sup> Hence Donald McIntosh’s infelicitous claim that ‘[s]ex and politics were the only two things that truly interested Machiavelli’ and that for Machiavelli ‘politics was the continuation of sex by other means’. Donald McIntosh, ‘The Modernity of Machiavelli’, *Political Theory*, 12 (2) (1984), p. 196.

gender, masculinity, the power of women and female sexuality. Machiavelli's version of male supremacy does not amount to a straightforward ban of women from the political space.<sup>56</sup>

It is, for example, not the case that women are categorically excluded from the position of princes.<sup>57</sup> In the first book of the *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli discusses Giovanna II, who in 1414 succeeds her brother to the throne of Naples, deftly outfoxes her enemies, and rules for over twenty years. Even more striking is Machiavelli's rendition of his contemporary, Caterina Sforza, Countess of Forlì, who is mentioned in all of his major historico-political works.<sup>58</sup> The story of Madonna Caterina revolves around the events surrounding a conspiracy that kills her husband in 1488 and in which she and her children are captured. The conspirators had not managed to secure the fortress of Forlì, where the castellan was still holding out. Caterina promises to hand over the fortress to the conspirators, if they let her enter it, and she offers them her children as hostages. Once inside, she threatens them 'with death and every kind of punishment'.<sup>59</sup> When the conspirators menace to kill her children, she famously exposes her genitals on the fortress wall and tells them 'she still had the mode for making more of them'.<sup>60</sup> The conspirators flee in fear of the countess, and Caterina, 'having retaken the state, avenge[s] her husband's death with every kind of cruelty [*con ogni generazione di crudeltà*]'.<sup>61</sup>

While Machiavelli does not explicitly call Caterina a prince, I think she is an exemplary specimen of one. She cleverly exploits her captors' confidence in conventional gender norms. Unable to imagine beyond traditional gendered categories, the conspirators underestimate her political astuteness and overestimate her attachment to her children, thus creating a political opportunity that

<sup>56</sup> Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman*, pp. 5, 8, 129, 253, 345. See also Matthes, *The Rape of Lucretia*, p. 81. *Contra* Viroli, who grasps at the straws of Machiavelli's correspondence to defend him against Pitkin's charge of an anxious masculinity. Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 30–1.

<sup>57</sup> Michelle T. Clarke, 'On the Woman Question in Machiavelli', *The Review of Politics*, 67 (2) (2005); Arlene W. Saxonhouse, *Women in the History of Political Thought: Ancient Greece to Machiavelli* (New York, 1985); Heather Hadar Wright, 'Lucretia in Mandragola: Machiavelli's New Prince', *Interpretation*, 36 (2) (2009). Zuckert goes so far as to argue — implausibly in my view — that *virtù* is an equal-opportunity category and Machiavelli perhaps 'the founder of what has become known as "liberal feminism"'. Catherine Zuckert, 'Fortune is a Woman — But So is Prudence', in *Feminist Interpretations of Niccolò Machiavelli*, ed. Maria J. Falco (University Park PA, 2004), p. 199.

<sup>58</sup> *The Prince* 20; *Discourses* 3.6; Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. Laura F. Banfield and Harvey C. Mansfield (Princeton NJ, 1988) (hereafter *Florentine Histories*), 7.22, 8.34; Niccolò Machiavelli, *Art of War*, trans. Christopher Lynch (Chicago, 2003), 7.145.

<sup>59</sup> *Florentine Histories* 8.34.

<sup>60</sup> *Discourses* 3.6.

<sup>61</sup> *Florentine Histories* 8.34.

Caterina harnesses to the full. She is in fact not so different from Brutus, who, as Livy reports at length, deceives everyone by playing the role of the fool only to take charge of the situation when the opportunity presents itself. Like Brutus, Caterina is willing to sacrifice her children; yet whereas Brutus is forced to witness his children's death, Caterina outwits the captors and instead turns the cruelty against them.<sup>62</sup>

And then there is Virgil's Dido — the legendary founder and first queen of Carthage — whom Machiavelli calls a 'new prince', citing a line from the *Aeneid* to underline his point that new princes 'cannot escape a name for cruelty because new states are full of danger'.<sup>63</sup> Like Lucretia, Dido commits suicide, and just as Lucretia, Dido kills herself out of loyalty to a man.

Unlike Dido, Giovanna or Caterina, Lucretia lacks a state. Not only does she lack political power, she does not even seek it. Lucretia will never rule, because she prefers death to dishonour. Successful female princes, it would seem, exercise power by acting gender-atypically and by flouting conventional gender norms (although Virgil's Dido, madly in love, passionate and erratic, hews more closely to the sexist stereotype). Indeed, one of the well-founded criticisms of Machiavelli's representation of these female princes is that they can only attain the rank of prince by being re-gendered as masculine.<sup>64</sup> Lucretia does the contrary: she sacrifices herself in the name of upholding such norms.<sup>65</sup> Yet while this may explain why she is not a paradigmatic female prince, it does not shed light on why she is marginalized as a *victim* of sexual violence. Even if one were to concur with Simone de Beauvoir's stark assessment that women have historically never exercised political power and have only ever been 'pretexts more than agents', Lucretia being the perfect

<sup>62</sup> There is a debate in the literature as to whether Machiavelli's representation of Caterina's skirt-raising is a symbolic display of maternal power or whether it functions to domesticate and de-politicize her, eliding both the power of her maternal body and the political power she exercises. For a defence of Caterina as an example of princely *virtù*, see Michelle T. Clarke, 'The Virtues of Republican Citizenship in Machiavelli's Discourses on Livy', *The Journal of Politics*, 75 (2) (2013), pp. 242, 246–8, 254. For a more pessimistic take, see Julia L. Hairston, 'Skirting the Issue: Machiavelli's Caterina Sforza', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 53 (3) (2000).

<sup>63</sup> *The Prince* 17. The quotation from the *Aeneid* reads: 'Hard conditions and the newness of my kingdom force me to use such means and to carefully guard the borders [*Res dura et regni novitas me talia cogunt | moliri, et late fines custode tueri*].' Virgil, *Aeneid*, 1.563–564.

<sup>64</sup> See for instance Hairston, 'Skirting the Issue', p. 708. Other scholars regard this as evidence that Machiavelli was not caught up on conventional, naturalized gender stereotypes. Saxonhouse, *Women in the History of Political Thought*, pp. 164–5; Clarke, 'On the Woman Question in Machiavelli', p. 252.

<sup>65</sup> That said, Ovid calls her a 'matron of manly spirit [*animi matrona virilis*]' while Valerius Maximus refers to the 'manly spirit by fortune's malignant error was allotted a woman's body [*virilis animus maligno errore fortunae muliebre corpus*]'. Ovid, *Fasti*, 2.847; Valerius Maximus, *Memorable Doings and Sayings*, 6.1.1.



exemplification, it is remarkable that Machiavelli denies Lucretia even the thin 'symbolic value' that Beauvoir accords her.<sup>66</sup> What is at stake for Machiavelli in refusing to treat Lucretia as a symbol?

As a symbol, Lucretia stands not only for herself but is a figure for violated Rome. Stephanie Jed, a scholar of Italian literature, contends that the early Roman annalists 'required a legend of rape to mark Rome's transition from monarchy to republican forms of government'.<sup>67</sup> As dead bodies, women incarnate powerful symbolic functions, and Lucretia is emblematic for exercising 'far more power as a corpse than as a living woman'.<sup>68</sup> Drawing on the work of the ancient historian Ettore Pais, Jed argues that the Roman historians may, in fact, have appropriated the tale from neighbouring Latin tribes.<sup>69</sup> If Jed and Pais are right about the borrowed status of the saga, this would indicate that the narrative meets certain discursive requirements for an origin story. In other words, the myth of Lucretia might be understood as responding to a narrative exigency concerning the origins of the Republic. Analogously, Jed argues that the Lucretia legend satisfied 'the need of the Florentines for an image of political integrity in the struggle against tyranny'.<sup>70</sup> One way to think about such exigencies is through the difficulty of consolidating political change, a problem that is pivotal to both Machiavelli's *The Prince* and the *Discourses*.

According to Livy, it is over the violated body of Lucretia that the fraternal bond between Brutus and his insurrectionary party is established. Brutus pulls the bloody knife from Lucretia's chest and passes it around, rallying the men present to swear an oath by her chaste blood to overthrow not only the Tarquins but the entire monarchical regime. As Andrew Feldherr, a scholar of Latin literature and historiography, notes, Brutus exposes and narrates Lucretia's rape as sacrifice.<sup>71</sup> Before he can become, as Machiavelli puts it, the 'father of Roman liberty',<sup>72</sup> Brutus must pass the knife that inflicts the mortal wound on Lucretia from hand to hand in a morbid ceremony that concludes the conspiratorial bonds. Lucretia's blood seals the republican social

<sup>66</sup> Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 150.

<sup>67</sup> Jed, *Chaste Thinking*, p. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Patricia Klindienst Joplin, 'Ritual Work on the Human Flesh: Livy's Lucretia and the Rape of the Body Politic', *Helios*, 17 (1) (1990), p. 64.

<sup>69</sup> Ettore Pais, *Ancient Legends of Roman History*, trans. Mario E. Cosenza (New York, 1905), p. 197. The accounts by Livy, Plutarch, Ovid, Augustine, Salutati and Boccaccio strongly suggest that the narrative of this rape was of crucial importance to the way the foundation of Roman republicanism was narrated. Matthes, *The Rape of Lucretia*, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> Jed, *Chaste Thinking*, p. 48.

<sup>71</sup> Andrew Feldherr, *Spectacle and Society in Livy's History* (Berkeley, 1998), p. 194.

<sup>72</sup> *Discourses* 3.1.

contract. Machiavelli's disavowal, then, amounts to a rejection of Lucretia's sacrificial status.

As opposed to Machiavelli, who turns Brutus into the father of Roman liberty on the grounds of his execution of his own sons, for Livy, Brutus becomes the father of Roman liberty by defending Lucretia's reputation.<sup>73</sup> On Brutus's death, Livy writes, the women of Rome 'mourned him for a year as a father. It was their special tribute to his fierce championship of a woman's honour'.<sup>74</sup> For the Roman women, Livy implies, it is not Brutus's republican filicide that establishes him as a *parens* or parent but his role as defender of women.

Even though Machiavelli deemphasizes the role of Lucretia's rape, he — like Livy, Petrarch and Salutati — idolizes Brutus for his filicide and for his capacity to repress grief and emotion. Brutus's ability to feign and to keep his emotions under control makes him an excellent conspirator from whose example 'all those who are discontented with a prince have to learn'.<sup>75</sup> The most important lesson that potential reformers can learn from Brutus is the importance of 'severity' in founding and maintaining republican freedom.

Machiavelli's celebration of Brutus's filicide sits uneasily with his disavowal of Lucretia's rape as a prelude to republican freedom. The asymmetry between the treatment of Lucretia and of Brutus's sons is striking. Both Brutus and Lucretia defend virtue and freedom through heroic acts of sacrifice (or 'severity'). If anything, Lucretia may well have taught Brutus a life-long lesson about courage and severity. In Jerome's words, Lucretia was 'the equal of Brutus, if not her superior, since Brutus learnt from a woman the impossibility of being a slave'.<sup>76</sup> Yet by extolling Brutus and disavowing Lucretia, Machiavelli denies the similarity between the two. On the one hand, Machiavelli contends that it was not the 'accident' of Lucretia's rape but the tyrannical conditions that caused the uprising against the Tarquins; on the other hand, he regards Brutus's execution of his sons as cause of the successful republican transition. In one case, the violence is accidental and contingent; in the other case, it is necessary and paradigmatic. Demurring to the Roman and humanist traditions, Machiavelli denies the conventional republican emplotment of Lucretia's rape and suicide and substitutes the killing of Brutus's male children for the founding violence of the Republic. While he does not challenge the premise that political change requires narratives of violence, he implies that some stories fulfil this role better than others and that

<sup>73</sup> See Klindienst Joplin, 'Ritual Work on the Human Flesh'.

<sup>74</sup> Livy, *Early History of Rome*, 2.7.

<sup>75</sup> *Discourses* 3.2.

<sup>76</sup> St Jerome, *Against Jovinianus*, in *Letters and Select Works*, trans. W.H. Fremantle (Grand Rapids MI, 1989), 1.49. See also Dustin E. Howes, *Freedom Without Violence: Resisting the Western Political Tradition* (Oxford and New York, 2016), p. 47.

rape stories, or at least Lucretia's rape and suicide, are not adequate violent origin stories.

There are obvious differences between the story of Lucretia and that of Brutus's sons. Lucretia is an example of unsanctioned violence exercised for personal pleasure by an imperious and usurping potentate followed by a suicide intended to restore sexual virtue. The execution of Brutus's sons typifies sanctioned public violence exercised in the name of the law against unlawfully conspiring elites by a fledgling republic. As a republican trope, Lucretia's rape is meant to evoke repugnance and hatred at the abusive practices of tyrants. The sacrificial execution of Brutus's sons, by contrast, is designed to elicit awe at the authority of the republic, trust in the rule of law, and trepidation at the punishment for treason. Yet politically, the rape of Lucretia is the precise inverse of the killing of Brutus's sons. Whereas the latter generates awe before the republic, the former inspires hatred against tyrants. It would stand to reason that a violent act that generates anti-tyrannical hatred is of importance to republican founding moments. If Machiavelli recognizes the symbolic importance of the execution of Brutus's sons, one would expect him to also attribute symbolic weight to the rape of Lucretia as an emblem of the illegitimate violence of tyranny.

Moreover, Lucretia's suicide can be interpreted as a morbid sacrificial strategy that forces her kinsmen's hands. The conventional wisdom in the scholarship is that Brutus is the figure who transforms the private crime into a public one through the oath he offers, and that he is the one who subsequently mobilizes the raw emotions of grief and reworks them into shared, purposive, collective political action.<sup>77</sup> But might we not read Lucretia as having staged her suicide to provoke precisely that sort of response? While both Lucretia's rape and her suicide take place inside the *domus* ('*in cubiculo*' writes Livy), she clearly choreographs her disclosure and suicide as a dramatic moment. After all, she is the one who asks her father and brother to each bring a friend, as if to prevent her death from being privatized. Moreover, she explicitly demands that her relatives avenge her. In Livy's rendition, she requests her husband's 'solemn promise' that her aggressor be punished; according to Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Lucretia instructs her father to consult with 'as many of your friends and kinsmen as you can [. . .] in what manner you will avenge both me and yourself'; and in Salutati's version, Lucretia exclaims 'my friends, goodbye; carry out the revenge you promised not less courageously than I will perform my murder'.<sup>78</sup> Petrarch describes Lucretia not

<sup>77</sup> According to Feldherr, it is only through the intervention of Brutus that Lucretia's suicide is converted into a sacrifice, and it is Brutus who transforms mourning into anger. Feldherr, *Spectacle and Society in Livy's History*, pp. 197–9.

<sup>78</sup> Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, 1.58; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 4.66; Salutati, 'Declamatio Lucretiae', p. 152.

only as demanding vengeance but as prompting the men to swear the oath.<sup>79</sup> Does this not convey a deliberate strategy to make her suicide a watershed moment in Roman political history? Can Brutus really lay claim to being the sole agent of transforming a private into a public crime, of converting injury, grief and mourning into anger and collective action?

#### IV Republican Chastity

Discursively, Lucretia's rape functions as a quintessential 'prologue to republican freedom' because of the particular ways in which it is narrated, namely as a story about chastity and sexual virtue.<sup>80</sup> The contrast between Lucretia's violated body and her pure spirit highlights the theme of chastity that is central to the way early modern republican humanists narrate the myth.<sup>81</sup> For instance, the early fifteenth-century treatise 'On Wifely Duties' authored by the Venetian humanist Francesco Barbaro, teaches chastity and frugality and calls on women to emulate Lucretia rather than Cleopatra.<sup>82</sup> But whereas for Barbaro, Lucretia's chastity remains a private moral virtue, for Petrarch, Salutati and Bruni, it metaphorizes the righteousness and integrity of the Roman revolt against tyranny. Thus for the civic ideology of humanist republicanism, Lucretia's plight acquires political value to the extent that sexual virtue becomes an allegory for political freedom.

On this account, Lucretia's rape is a metaphor for tyranny and her stained chastity authorizes collective revenge. 'Chastity' then, is not primarily a practice of virtue but a currency of male honour (or rather: it is only a virtue to the extent that it serves as an equivalent for male honour). The offence of the rape is not directed against Lucretia but against the principles that govern the exchange of women between men and against the claims men make over women's bodies. The sequential framing of the legend, starting with a chastity contest and ending with the liberation of Rome from the Tarquins produces the rape as a violation of male property and as a site of contest among men.<sup>83</sup> The governing logic of the tale converts the physical violation of Lucretia's body into a moral outrage concerning the honour of her male relatives, what

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<sup>79</sup> Petrarch, *L'Africa*, pp. 720–2.

<sup>80</sup> Jed, *Chaste Thinking*, p. 5. On chastity in Livy, see Stefan Freund, 'Pudicitia saltem in tuto sit: Lucretia, Verginia und die Konstruktion eines Wertbegriffs bei Livius', *Hermes*, 136 (3) (2008).

<sup>81</sup> Jed, *Chaste Thinking*, p. 13.

<sup>82</sup> Francesco Barbaro, 'On Wifely Duties', in *The Earthly Republic*, ed. Kohl, Witt and Welles, p. 212.

<sup>83</sup> See Barbara Baines, *Representing Rape in the English Early Modern Period* (Lewiston NY, 2003), pp. 87–101. On rape in early modern English literature, see also Jocelyn Catty, *Writing Rape, Writing Women in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke and London, 1999).

Jed calls 'chaste thinking'.<sup>84</sup> Following Jed, Lucretia's sacrifice becomes meaningful only insofar as it is predicated on this paradigm of chastity.

In the logic of the narrative, Lucretia's violation is sign and proof of the Tarquins' tyrannical rule. Feldherr observes that the Tarquins' repeated transgressions of the boundaries between public and private spaces epitomize the degenerated status of civic life under the monarchy.<sup>85</sup> Only in a tyranny can royalty get away with raping a male subject's wife. In Salutati's words, 'what woman will be safe if Lucretia has been raped?'<sup>86</sup> By putting an end to the tyrannical conditions, Brutus not only avenges Lucretia's rape but also eliminates the circumstances that make such a violation possible. He thus restores the conditions for proper sexual virtue.

Yet even as Lucretia is consecrated as a heroine, the anti-tyrannical narrative displaces both her body and the people's mourning over her suicide. In Livy's version, Brutus shouts at the distressed crowd that it is 'time for deeds not tears', urging them to turn their grief into anger. As soon as Brutus hands the bloody knife to Collatinus, Lucretius and Valerius, and the conspirators swear their oath, their grief is 'forgotten in a sudden surge of anger'.<sup>87</sup> From that moment on, grief is no longer a way of dealing with loss but becomes a political mechanism, building opposition to the monarchy. Lucretia's rape ceases to be a crime that demands justice and instead becomes a symbol for tyranny. Hence when Brutus gives his speech in the Forum, he paints 'in vivid colours' the 'bereavement of [Lucretia's] father, for whom the cause of her death was an even bitterer and more dreadful thing than the death itself'.<sup>88</sup> Just as the men's grief over Lucretia's death is quickly 'forgotten', for her sacrifice to acquire political significance, the indignation and outrage incited by her death must be subordinated to the hatred of tyranny. The price, in other words, for Lucretia to become a republican symbol, is that her death cannot be properly mourned.

Like Livy, Machiavelli considers republican government to be more propitious for patriarchal sexual virtue than tyrannies or principalities. That tyrants are more likely to sexually transgress than republicans is clear from the passages from *The Prince* and the *Discourses* cited earlier that warn precisely against such abuses.<sup>89</sup> Not only does Machiavelli repeatedly worry about the propensity of princes to seize their male subjects' women, but he identifies one of the principal values of a republican 'free way of life [*vivere libero*]' as freedom from fear 'for the honour of women and that of children'.<sup>90</sup> That

<sup>84</sup> Jed, *Chaste Thinking*, p. 3.

<sup>85</sup> Feldherr, *Spectacle and Society in Livy's History*, p. 194.

<sup>86</sup> Salutati, 'Declamatio Lucretiae', p. 151.

<sup>87</sup> Livy, *Early History of Rome*, 1.59.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *The Prince* 17, 19; *Discourses* 3.6, 3.26.

<sup>90</sup> *Discourses* 1.16.

republics are more likely to generate sexual virtue than principalities is also the upshot of his praise of Scipio, for whose reputation the capture of New Carthage did less than the honourable decision to return a young and beautiful female prisoner of war to her lover.<sup>91</sup>

Yet, unlike his Roman and Florentine predecessors, Machiavelli has no use for sexual purity. In contrast to Livy's, Petrarch's and Salutati's exaltations of female sexual abstinence and chastity, Machiavelli refuses to accept sexual probity as a proxy for moral, let alone political virtue. Much has been written on Machiavelli's concept of *virtù* and the relationship between moral and political *virtù* remains controversial. Yet most commentators accept that *virtù* is not reducible to conventional conceptions of moral virtue.<sup>92</sup> In particular, Machiavelli rejects a basic tenet of civic humanism: that the moral virtue of the ruling class is the condition for good government and that such virtue is instilled by a classical education and best practised in republican competition for public honours. For civic humanists, moral virtue (including sexual virtue, such as chastity, moderation and self-control) serves as a synecdoche for political virtue. Resting on a classical education and on the acceptance of classical standards of moral behaviour, a virtuous character is not just a mark of personal dignity but 'a necessary and sufficient title to rule'.<sup>93</sup>

It is for these reasons that the Lucretia myth represents a perfect condensation of the moral and political lessons of civic humanism. It narrates the political downfall of a corrupt royal family as a direct result of moral vice and sexual crime; and I suggest that this is precisely the bone of contention in the conventional emplotment of the myth. Machiavelli downplays the role of the Roman kings' sexual crimes in their downfall on grounds of his deep suspicions against moralism.

Machiavelli's misgivings about the norms of sexual purity have theoretical, political and biographical dimensions. Theoretically, pontifications about sexual probity are an instance of a reified conception of virtue that he challenges throughout his work. Politically, they were part of the pious discourse of the *piagnoni*, the followers of Savonarola who sought to cleanse Florence of vice and vanities and for whom sexual corruption in the form of lust and especially sodomy was testament to the city's sinfulness.<sup>94</sup> Biographically, Machiavelli frequently presents himself, especially in his letters,

<sup>91</sup> *Discourses* 3.20; Livy, *Early History of Rome*, 26.50.

<sup>92</sup> On Machiavelli's concept of *virtù*, see Russell Price, 'The Senses of *Virtù* in Machiavelli', *European Studies Review*, 3 (4) (1973).

<sup>93</sup> James Hankins, 'Machiavelli, Civic Humanism, and the Humanist Politics of Virtue', *Italian Culture*, 32 (2) (2014), p. 102.

<sup>94</sup> In one of his sermons on Aggeus, delivered on the third Sunday of Advent in 1494, Savonarola insists that 'it is necessary that the Signory pass laws against that accursed vice of sodomy, for which you know that Florence is infamous throughout the whole of Italy [. . .] Pass a law, I say, and let it be without mercy; that is, let these people be stoned and burned'. In his 'Treatise on the Government of Florence', Savonarola also draws on

as passionately pursuing sexual pleasures, which suggests that he would have had no patience for sanctimonious views about chastity.<sup>95</sup> His friends teased him for being a fervent lover and a sodomite, and even his enemies used his reputation for sexual vice as a means of denouncing him.<sup>96</sup>

For all these reasons, Machiavelli would have been sceptical about the narrative logic of a myth in which the female hero attains her anointed status by an act of self-destruction in the name of chastity. Machiavelli's argument, in *Discourses* 3.5, that it was lawlessness and tyranny that cost Tarquin his state not his son's misdeeds suggests as much. There, Machiavelli insists that it was Tarquin's attack on Roman freedom that disposed the Romans to rebellion. Tarquin managed to antagonize both the patricians and the plebs, the patricians by eroding the authority of the Senate and the plebs by imposing forced labour in addition to military duties. Lucretia, Machiavelli intimates, was an epiphenomenon of the Tarquins' tyranny: 'if the accident of Lucretia had not come, as soon as another had arisen, it would have brought the same effect'.<sup>97</sup> In contrast to the Roman historians for whom Lucretia's violation and suicide causes the overthrow of the monarchy, Machiavelli emphasizes structural factors. The rebellion against the Tarquins, he argues, was fuelled by the conflict between the monarchy and the nobility for power and authority and by the discontent of plebeian workers over the surplus hard labour extracted from them. The focus on class signals a shift away from the heroic characters of Lucretia, Brutus and Collatinus and towards a historiography that observes social conditions as determinants of historical change.

It is not obvious that to celebrate Lucretia's rape as a prelude to republican foundings — as Machiavelli's humanist predecessors are wont to do — is in any way 'better', less patriarchal or less misogynist than Machiavelli's disavowal of it. Indeed, one might interpret Machiavelli's challenge to the humanist orthodoxy concerning Lucretia as an attempt to keep questions of chastity and sexual virtue outside the political sphere. The story of Lucretia arguably teaches us little about politics except for Sextus's abuse of power.

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the trope of tyrants' inability to control their sexual appetites such that 'all the chastity and modesty of women are endangered by his lustfulness'. *Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 1490–1498*, ed. Anne Borelli and Maria C. Pastore Passaro (New Haven, 2006), pp. 157–8, 193.

<sup>95</sup> Guido Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love: Sex, Self, and Society in the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore, 2007), pp. 108–62; Niccolò Capponi, *An Unlikely Prince: The Life and Times of Machiavelli* (Cambridge MA, 2010), pp. 62–5.

<sup>96</sup> While he served as Secretary in the Florentine Chancery, an anonymous letter implicated him in inappropriate sexual acts with another 'Lucrezia', a prostitute whom he was known to frequent and whom he was accused of having sodomized. A.S.F., Otto di Guardia, epoca repubblicana, I47, fo. 17V, quoted in J.N. Stephens and H.C. Butters, 'New Light on Machiavelli', *English Historical Review* (1982), p. 66.

<sup>97</sup> *Discourses* 3.5.

Machiavelli, by contrast, seeks to offer a decisively political rather than moral explanation for the revolution that instituted Rome's political freedom.

## V

### Lucretia as Comedy

Renaissance literature is full of rape tales, many of which are drawn from classical literature.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, fantasies of non-consensual sex, chastity and sexual virtue are central to the raunchy plots of adultery and wife-stealing that make up Machiavelli's own comedies, *Mandragola* and *Clizia*, both of which can be interpreted as imaginative retellings of the Lucretia story.<sup>99</sup> In *Mandragola*, a hedonistic and lecherous protagonist named Callimaco aided by a cunning strategist named Ligurio successfully tricks a beautiful Lucrezia into adultery. Lucrezia is not only pretty but chaste, and Callimaco, cast as a modern-day Tarquin, head-over-heels in love but without the tyrant's ability to get away with rape, must find a suitable substitute for force. That substitute, of course, is deception, which comes as no surprise to readers who pay attention to Chapter 18 of *The Prince*. By a stroke of luck, Lucrezia is married to a dull-witted fool, Messer Nicia, who is compulsively fixated on producing an heir. Coached by Ligurio, Callimaco poses as a doctor and prescribes a potion extracted from the mandrake root (*mandragola*), an ostensible cure for infertility.<sup>100</sup> But the side effect of the medicine is that it will kill the first man who sleeps with Lucrezia after she takes the drug. They must therefore find someone expendable to have intercourse with Lucrezia, and, more importantly, they have to find a way to persuade this virtuous woman to have sex with a stranger who will pay for the escapade with his life. The men turn to Lucrezia's confessor, the corrupt friar Timoteo, to coax Lucrezia into this arrangement by persuading her that what looks like adultery is in fact virtuous.

As the literary scholar Ian Donaldson notes, Timoteo's speech to Lucrezia parodies a number of tropes from the classical version of the story and from the history of its interpretation.<sup>101</sup> As Machiavelli's caricature of the classical

<sup>98</sup> Jackson I. Cope, *Secret Sharers in Italian Comedy: From Machiavelli to Goldoni* (Durham NC, 1996); Jane Tylus, 'Colonizing Peasants: The Rape of the Sabines and Renaissance Pastoral', *Renaissance Drama*, 23 (1992).

<sup>99</sup> A number of interpreters have argued that *Mandragola* is Machiavelli's version of the Roman myth. For in-depth comparisons, see Mera J. Flaumenhaft, 'The Comic Remedy: Machiavelli's "Mandragola"', *Interpretation*, 7 (2) (1978); Martinez, 'The Pharmacy of Machiavelli'; Matthes, *The Rape of Lucretia*, pp. 77–97.

<sup>100</sup> On the mandrake root's medicinal properties, see Ronald L. Martinez, 'Machiavelli and Traditions of Renaissance Theater', in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge, 2010), p. 213; Carlo Dionisotti, 'Appunti sulla "Mandragola"', *Belfagor*, 39 (1984), pp. 622–3.

<sup>101</sup> Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia*, pp. 91–2.



myth, *Mandragola* represents an all-out attack on the republican infatuation with Lucretia and on the convergence of republican freedom and hetero-patriarchal norms of sexual virtue. In contrast to the solemn political context in which Livy sets the drama or the austere moral dilemma that Augustine formulates, Machiavelli parodies the legend by turning it into a salacious story of wife-stealing and adultery.<sup>102</sup> Machiavelli's Lucrezia is not raped but takes the adulterer Callimaco as her lover, enjoys his company and invites him back. Described as 'fit to rule a kingdom',<sup>103</sup> Lucrezia emerges not as victim but as the one in charge of the situation.<sup>104</sup> Unlike the Tarquins, who pay the price of dethronement and exile for Sextus's crime, Callimaco succeeds in his adulterous endeavours with the assistance of everyone involved.

It is tempting to agree with Pitkin that Machiavelli confines women 'almost entirely [to] plays and poetry, depicting private life or fantasy worlds', were it not for the fact that theatricality is so central to Machiavelli's conception of politics.<sup>105</sup> We must, in other words, take Machiavelli's plays seriously as a genre of political commentary. To take theatre seriously doesn't mean that one has to accept the moralistic view which reads *Mandragola* as an allegorical critique of Florentine corruption, whereby Lucrezia's body and virtue metonymically substitute for the Florentine citizenry.<sup>106</sup> Against this tragic reading, I view *Mandragola* as part of Machiavelli's lifelong campaign against moralism, against the pious hypocrisies of the Church, and for the demystification of power.<sup>107</sup> Rather than interpreting Lucrezia's assent to adultery as

<sup>102</sup> Machiavelli was not the only playwright who drew on the myth as material for theatre. Other important versions include Madeleine de Scudéry's *Clélie* (1654–60), A.V. Arnault's *Lucrece, ou Rome libre* (1792), and Rousseau's unfinished *La mort de Lucrece* (1792). Each of these texts reimagines Lucretia, not as severe Roman matron but as passionate and afflicted with the emotional and moral quandaries of adultery. See Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia*, p. 84.

<sup>103</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *Mandragola*, trans. Alan Gilbert, *The Chief Works and Others*, Vol. 2 (Durham, 1989) (hereafter *Mandragola*), 1.3, p. 783.

<sup>104</sup> See Jo Ann Cavallo, 'Machiavelli and Women', in *Seeking Real Truths: Multi-disciplinary Perspectives on Machiavelli*, ed. Patricia Vilches and Gerald Seaman (Leiden, 2007), p. 136.

<sup>105</sup> Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman*, p. 109.

<sup>106</sup> Benedetto Croce, 'La commedia del rinascimento', in *Poesia popolare e poesia d'arte* (Baria, 1932), p. 247. For Croce, the comedy has an entirely tragic tenor. For similar political readings (without the tragic mood) that identify Callimaco with the prince, Lucrezia with Florence, Ligurio with Machiavelli, and Nicia with Soderini, see Theodore A. Sumberg, 'La Mandragola: An Interpretation', *The Journal of Politics*, 23 (2) (1961); Alessandro Parronchi, 'La prima rappresentazione della *Mandragola*: Il modello per l'apparato. L'allegoria', *La Bibliofilia*, 64 (1962); Carnes Lord, 'On Machiavelli's *Mandragola*', *The Journal of Politics*, 41 (3) (1979). For a critique, see Dionisotti, 'Appunti sulla "Mandragola" '.

<sup>107</sup> Hence I regard the moralistic debate about whether Lucrezia's assent to adultery represents civic or moral failure to be misplaced. See for example Susan Behuniak-Long,

evidence for the unmitigated corruption of civic life, we can read the comedy as an acerbic commentary on both the pious moralism as well as the meta-normative premises concerning the relation between sexual and political virtue that animate conventional accounts of the myth.<sup>108</sup>

Yet if *Mandragola* undermines the sanctimonious norms of monogamy and the convertibility of sexual and political virtue on which the moral logic of the myth rests, it does so at the cost of trivializing rape. *Mandragola* is not only a story about how a woman initially duped into adultery comes to enjoy it and becomes a willing accomplice in marital infidelity. It is also a story about how a woman's resistance to unwanted sex is only provisional, an effect of moral conformity, naïveté or inexperience that is easily disarmed by a shrewd manipulator. Just as the *Discourses* disavow the political significance of Lucretia's rape, *Mandragola* denies that the act constitutes rape in the first place. Moreover, if the comedy figures Lucrezia as at once the elusive object of desire, the powerful would-be prince, and the castrating womb that harbours toxic death for her lover, it ends by re-establishing normative gender roles. Lucrezia tells Callimaco: 'I take you then for lord, master, guide; you are my father, you are my defender'.<sup>109</sup> It also raises the question of what it might mean that the comedy's Lucrezia can become a prince while her legendary counterpart cannot. Why must Lucrezia become a consenting subject to be a prince? Martinez notes that Machiavelli transforms 'Livy's episode of ritual, cathartic violence into a sly and cynical fable of bourgeois accommodation and civic corruption'.<sup>110</sup> In so doing, he not only evacuates rape from the narrative but chips away at the iconography of heroic resistance, devotion, severity and self-discipline that made the story such a powerful image for anti-tyrannical politics.

### Conclusion

Machiavelli's disavowal of Lucretia is puzzling for four reasons. First, Roman historians and humanist writers for the most part idolized Lucretia's sacrifice, mythologizing her suicide as a founding act in the origin story of the Roman republic. Second, Machiavelli generally acknowledges and endorses narratives of spectacular founding violence. Third (and relatedly), Machiavelli praises Brutus's execution of his own children as indispensable to the

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'The Significance of Lucrezia in Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*', *The Review of Politics*, 51 (2) (1989).

<sup>108</sup> Brandon Turner argues convincingly that *Mandragola* allegorizes the emergence of a new political order out of an economy of vice. Brandon Turner, 'Private Vices, Public Benefits: Mandragola in Machiavelli's Political Theory', *Polity*, 48 (1) (2016).

<sup>109</sup> *Mandragola* 5.4, p. 819. For an insightful interpretation of the comedy's sexual dimension, see Valeria Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade: Masculinity, Paternity, and Castration in the Italian Renaissance* (Durham, 2003), pp. 79–117.

<sup>110</sup> Martinez, 'The Pharmacy of Machiavelli', p. 20.

founding of the Roman republic. Fourth, Sextus's actions epitomize the tyrannical hubris and rapacity against which Machiavelli warns princes.

Machiavelli's sceptical attitude to Lucretia is not adequately explained by chalking it up to his patriarchal conception of politics or his stereotypically sexist view of women. After all, the Roman historians and medieval and Renaissance commentators who glorified Lucretia were hardly less beholden to patriarchal and sexist ideology than Machiavelli; and their praise of Lucretia did not spring from a feminist historiography that seeks to emphasize women as political actors.

Machiavelli refuses to extol Lucretia as a republican hero because he rejects a key metanormative premise and rhetorical trope of civic humanism, namely the idea that sexual virtue is a synecdoche for political virtue. If, as Machiavelli insists, conventional norms of moral probity are not convertible with political virtue but are frequently at odds, then chastity is a poor template for republican virtue or freedom. By extension, if chastity cannot symbolize republican virtue, then the entire sequence of the myth as put forward by Livy, Petrarch, Salutati and Bruni is compromised.

Yet Machiavelli seems to assign to political violence an incoherent and contradictory political value, one that cannot easily be resolved by references to conventional patriarchal norms of sexual virtue nor by norms of representation in feminist historiography. Rather than interpreting the gendered gaps in Machiavelli's political theory as evidence of the exclusion of women from the political fold, I think they make possible a symbolically productive incoherence. As feminist theorists such as Brown, Zerilli and Purtschert have shown, in the history of political thought, representations of women often stabilize the masculine political subject and the gendered conception of the political field as a whole.<sup>111</sup> The figure of woman marks that which is both necessary and makes possible social life but also threatens its coherence and borders.

Such symbolic boundaries shed light on some of the tacit presuppositions of Machiavelli's political world. To exercise political power, to hold office and to be a political actor, for Machiavelli, is to expose oneself to the hazard of violent death. To act politically is to make enemies who will use whatever forces they can muster to pursue their objectives. It is to risk not only one's position and office but ultimately one's life. Violence is not only a metonymy for action but also for political passion. Even more than being a potential agent of violence, the quintessential Machiavellian subject is a potential patient of violence, a possible recipient of violent action.

Kinship and in particular male lineage, which is one of the transfer points for power, becomes the scene of violence, the place where violence is staged.

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<sup>111</sup> Wendy Brown, *Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading in Political Theory* (Totowa NJ, 1988); Linda M.G. Zerilli, *Signifying Woman: Culture and Chaos in Rousseau, Burke, and Mill* (Ithaca, 1994); Patricia Purtschert, *Grenzfiguren: Kultur, Geschlecht und Subjekt bei Hegel und Nietzsche* (Frankfurt, 2006).

Being an immediate male relative is a resource, for one can be a 'natural prince', an option not usually open to female next of kin. Natural princes, Machiavelli emphasizes in Chapter 2 of *The Prince* are in a privileged position: they come to power without violence and thus benefit from the people's love and good will. Yet if the prospect of becoming a natural prince is an attractive privilege, the nexus of male kinship is not only the point at which masculinity and power is reproduced. To the extent that it marks the 'blood-line' of hereditary power and traditional legitimacy, male kinship is also a site of potential violence and thus precarious. Lucretia's disavowal by Machiavelli may be a function of her gendered exclusion, not from those who are agents of violence but from those whose lives may be sacrificed for political motives. As privileged sites for killing, male kinship relations thus chart a social map of politically recognizable death and trace the gender code of Machiavellian political violence.

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