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Machiavelli's Lucretia and the Origins of the Roman Republic

Rape, Gender, and Founding Violence

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As many commentators have noted, 'founding' is a key category for Machiavelli. Both in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, and arguably in his other works as well, Machiavelli praises the role played by founders in establishing and regenerating political institutions.[1] Founding is important because it challenges the traditional principle of heredity. In contrast to the hereditary schema, which apportions legitimacy on the basis of one's lineage, family, and pedigree, founding valorizes action. Founders create new political and social orders; in so doing, they challenge convention and exhibit a central value Machiavelli associates with free life: autonomy.[2] Founders act alone, Machiavelli insists repeatedly. They are authorized not by ancestry and tradition but by what they create. They are often outsiders, arrivistes, men of humble origin whose backgrounds do not obviously destine them to positions of power.[3] Founders pursue their political objectives with great ambition, and often by ruthless means. Lethal violence, Machiavelli intimates, is central to creating new institutions. It fulfils at least two functions: it coerces the enemies of the new order, typically powerful and wealthy elites, into submission, and it inaugurates the new order symbolically.[4]

Given the importance that Machiavelli accords to founders and to forms of founding violence in particular, it is important to inquire into the criteria for what makes an appropriate founder and appropriate forms of founding violence. At issue is the question of who can play the role of founder, and what forms of violence count as constitutively political. In this chapter, I approach this question through a reading of the legendary figure of Lucretia, the Roman woman whose rape and subsequent suicide triggered the revolution against the Etruscan kings and the establishment of the Roman republic.

Lucretia is an interesting figure. Her role in the overthrow of the Tarquins is treated extensively by Roman historians and by medieval and Renaissance authors. In this literature, she is frequently hailed as a courageous heroine, and even those who criticize her actions on moral or religious grounds

(above all Augustine) treat her as one of the protagonists of the revolution that transformed Rome from a monarchy into a republic.

In his account of the Roman revolution, Machiavelli, by contrast, sidelines Lucretia and greatly diminishes her role.[5] Even though that revolution is central to Machiavelli's political theory, and notwithstanding the significance of violence in his concept of founding, Lucretia largely fades from the narrative of the upheaval in 509 BCE. While Machiavelli frequently invokes the expulsion of the Tarquins, he assigns Lucretia a peculiar and contradictory role. As I will show, this disavowal of Lucretia is surprising for historical, conceptual, and symbolic reasons.

Predictably, Machiavelli's preoccupation with founding is decisively gendered. Not only are founders generally men, but to the extent that founding is a violent process, the logics and practices of killing are embedded in hegemonic masculine discourses; they promote myths and stereotypes of militarized masculinity; and they symbolically privilege values and concerns conventionally associated with masculinity. As such, Machiavelli's work both reflects and epitomizes time-honoured patriarchal schemas prevalent in the history of Western political thought. Yet as multiple decades of feminist scholarship have shown, the gendered nature of Machiavelli's thought instantiates not merely broader trends in the history of European political thought but exhibits idiosyncratic traits.[6]

In this chapter, I explore the gendered dimension of Machiavelli's concern with violence. But unlike most of the existing scholarship on this issue, I am interested less in resolving who exercises it and to what extent women are represented as agents of violence than in the question of what forms of violence Machiavelli describes as political. What are the (gendered) norms whereby some formations of violence are recognized and celebrated as political, as having historical importance, whereas others are trivialized? Machiavelli's reception and treatment of Lucretia raise questions about the political status and meaning of sexual and gender-based violence in his work.

The Legend of Lucretia

According to legend, Rome became a republic in 509 BCE, when a popular uprising deposed the seventh king of Rome, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud). According to Livy (1:49), Tarquin the Proud merited his name.[7] Unlike the previous Etruscan kings, whom Livy describes as 'successive founders' ('deinceps conditores') of Rome (2:1),[8] Tarquin the Proud was a tyrant. Even though Rome at the time was an elective monarchy, Tarquin had usurped

the throne, ruled by treachery, violence, and brutality, flouted political customs and traditions, and ignored the Senate. To build his ambitious construction projects, the massive temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline, the Circus, and the great sewer (cloaca maxima), he forcibly recruited large numbers of workers, who were coerced into hard labour.

Yet as Livy tells the story (1:57), it was not Tarquin's abuses of power or his merciless treatment of the working class that led to the uprising against him. Rather, the trigger was the rape and suicide of Lucretia by the king's son and confidant, Sextus. Stationed in Ardea, Sextus spent his time, between bouts of military action, in drinking with other members of the Roman elite. Amid their drinking games, the men engage in a chastity competition on behalf of their wives, squabbling over whose wife was the most virtuous. To settle the issue, they decide to mount their horses and ride to Rome to surprise their wives and see what they are up to. Whereas the other wives spend their time, much as their husbands do, at parties, drinking and amusing themselves, Lucretia is found spinning at home, surrounded by her maidservants. Sextus, at this point, becomes obsessed with Lucretia's 'beauty and proven chastity', which kindled in him 'the flame of lust, and determined him to debauch her'.[9]

A few days later, Sextus secretly returns to Lucretia's house, where he is hospitably received late at night. He then enters her chambers and rapes her at knife-point. Lucretia initially resists, but Sextus threatens to kill her and lay her next to a slave to suggest that she had been unfaithful to her husband. The prospect of such dishonour sways Lucretia, and Sextus rides away, proud of his success. Lucretia summons her father and husband, asks both to come immediately and bring a trusted friend each. Her husband brings Lucius Junius Brutus, son of the king's sister and Sextus's first cousin. She recounts the story and proclaims her innocence:

> My body only has been violated. My heart is innocent, and death will be my witness. Give me your solemn promise that the adulterer shall be punished—he is Sextus Tarquinius. He it is who last night came as my enemy disguised as my guest, and took his pleasure of me. That pleasure will be my death—and his, too, if you are men.[10]

Having dramatically conveyed her last wish, she draws a knife and plunges it into her heart.

According to Livy's narrative, Lucretia's suicide galvanizes opposition to the Tarquins. The opposition is led by Brutus, who had witnessed the

suicide that left him a 'changed man', infused with a new spirit ('novum … ingenium').[11] Brutus successfully transforms the family grief into anger at the Tarquins and goes on to deliver public speeches that impugn the royal family and demand their abdication. While the people of Rome shut the Tarquins out of the city, Brutus calls on the army to revolt and is enthusiastically received by the troops. The monarchy is abolished, and in its place, the position of the twin consuls is created. Brutus will serve as the republic's first consul, a point that is important, because it is in his capacity as consul that he will become one of Machiavelli's esteemed founder figures.

During his consulship, Brutus proves (in Livy's estimation) to be 'as zealous in guarding liberty as he had been in demanding it'.[12] Rome's republican liberty was at risk from a conspiracy of young aristocrats who 'had found life under the monarchy very agreeable'. These young members of the elite, which included Brutus's own sons, had been able to take full advantage of their privileged position under the Tarquins, giving 'a freer rein to their appetites and [living] the dissolute and irresponsible life of the court'.[13] They now found that unlike a king with whom they could negotiate and make deals, a republic governed by law was less receptive to elite influence. The young aristocrats secretly met with envoys from the Tarquins and plotted the latter's return. They were, however, overheard by a slave who promptly reported them to the consuls. The conspirators were sentenced to death. Livy writes: 'It was a memorable scene: for the consular office imposed upon a father the duty of exacting the supreme penalty from his sons, so that he who, of all men, should have been spared the sight of their suffering was the one whom fate ordained to enforce it.'[14]

Machiavelli's Version of the Roman Revolution

The expulsion of the Tarquins is a central theme in Machiavelli's *Discourses*.[15] In his rendition of Roman history, this event inaugurates the golden age of Rome, releasing the humours of the people and the nobles and giving rise to the virtuous class conflict that he regards as 'the first cause of keeping Rome free'.[16] One can call the period between the expulsion of the Tarquins and the tribuneships of the Gracchi a golden age, because during these three hundred years, the 'tumults' ('tumulti') rarely produced exile or violence ('violenza') but rather 'laws and orders in benefit of public freedom'.[17] During this period, 'freedom was never taken away by any of its citizens'.[18] The Roman people were 'hostile … to the kingly name and a lover of the glory and common good of [their] fatherland'.[19]

Yet even though the transition from the monarchy to the republic is key to Machiavelli's account of Roman history, he actually denies that it constituted a revolution. In *Discourses* 1:9, he emphasizes rather that Romulus had already provided Rome with the orders suitable to a republic. As evidence, Machiavelli cites the fact that republican Rome did not innovate any new institutions, save replacing the king by two consuls with one-year terms. 'This testifies that all the first orders of that city were more conformable to a civil and free way of life than to an absolute and tyrannical one.'[20] For Machiavelli, Rome acquired its freedom not by revolting against the Tarquins but by '*accident* … *after* the expulsion of the Tarquins' (emphasis added).[21] The 'accident' Machiavelli has in mind is Brutus's execution of his sons, which he regards as the actual moment Rome became free. New states, he insists, have enemies rather than friends. And to deal with these enemies there was 'no remedy more powerful, nor more valid, more secure, and more necessary, than to kill the sons of Brutus'.[22]

'Killing the sons of Brutus' is Machiavelli's enigmatic shorthand for the quasi-sacrificial bloodshed of the enemies of a state, especially a popular state: throughout *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, Machiavelli emphasizes the importance of a firm, uncompromising, and violent response to such enemies.[23] Brutus's execution of his sons is also listed as the first and paradigmatic item of a series of executions that 'drew the Roman republic back toward its beginning'.[24] Such returns to the beginning are important, because they are the only effective remedy against the inevitable corruption and disintegration of civic life. Accordingly, Brutus becomes, in Machiavelli's telling, the key figure and hero of the Roman revolution, or as Machiavelli puts it, 'father of Roman liberty'.[25] Brutus merits this title, not because he led a popular uprising against the monarchy but because, when confronted with the difficult choice between saving his own sons and defending the republic, he opts for the public good, even though it means sacrificing his own children.

Unlike Brutus, whom Machiavelli celebrates for his unwavering commitment to freedom and his willingness to sacrifice his own interests in the name of virtue, Machiavelli has very little to say about the other actor who similarly sacrifices her own interest in the name of virtue: Lucretia. Like Brutus, Lucretia murders her own flesh and blood in front of witnesses. Like Brutus, she sees her act as a response to a fundamental violation of the principles that regulate social and political life, a response to a most perfidious form of disloyalty and an inexcusable breach of trust. Like Brutus, who calls on the Romans to take up arms against the tyrants, Lucretia demands the Tarquins' death. Indeed, one could argue that Lucretia inaugurates the anti-tyrannical motif, turning her victimization by the tyrant into a rallying

cry against the monarchy. In St. Jerome's words, Lucretia was 'the equal of Brutus, if not her superior, since Brutus learnt from [her] the impossibility of being a slave'.[26]

And yet, in the *Discourses*, Machiavelli treats Lucretia as a minor character, denying her the political and historical importance which Roman historians as well as medieval and Renaissance authors had routinely accorded her. Lucretia comes up in four chapters of the *Discourses* (3:2, 3:5, 3:7, 3:26). In the first occurrence (*Disc.* 3:2; *Opere* 197), she is already dead, and Machiavelli refers to her ('la morta Lucrezia') as the body from whom Brutus draws the bloody knife and makes the bystanders swear an oath to end the monarchy. The second time she is invoked, Machiavelli refers to her rape and suicide as a contingent event and argues 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 … If the accident of Lucretia had not come, as soon as another had arisen, it would have brought the same effect.'[27] A couple of chapters later, Lucretia comes up again; or rather, her name does not appear, because Machiavelli doubles down on his earlier dismissal of her historical role. He now distinguishes major institutional transformations that are bloodless from ones that are bloody. The Roman revolution, he insists, is of the first kind: '[N]one other than the Tarquins were expelled, with no offense to anyone else.'[28] No offence to anyone else! Clearly, Lucretia does not count as 'qualunque altro'. Finally, Lucretia has the dubious honour of being included in the infamous chapter titled 'How a State Is Ruined Because of Women'.[29] That chapter, which focuses on state-wrecking women, suggests—in tension with the earlier claims—that 'the excess done against Lucretia took the state away from the Tarquins'.

In sum, two out of the four chapters where Lucretia appears dismiss her role in the Roman revolution entirely: in *Discourses* 3:5 and 3:7, although in the latter case it would be more accurate to say that she does not actually appear, because she is effectively erased from the narrative. In these chapters, both her rape and her suicide are trivialized and marginalized. Machiavelli seems to suggest that rape and suicide are forms of violence that do not qualify as founding events and do not count as politically relevant moments in the history of states. Not even Lucretia's injuries are recognized as politically pertinent, or indeed as morally relevant at all. The two other chapters concede Lucretia's involvement in the uprising, yet only as a passive, raped, and dead body exposed to the male gaze, an object of male desire contaminated by tyrannical power.

Machiavelli's denial in the *Discourses* of the political and historical role that other commentators routinely grant Lucretia is surprising for various reasons. First, as I briefly indicated earlier, Lucretia seems in many ways an analogue to Brutus. She is an anti-tyrannical hero who sacrifices her own flesh and blood in the name of public virtue. Why does her sacrifice not count as political, and why does she not qualify for inclusion in the pantheon of Roman founding figures? Second, Machiavelli treats the Lucretia myth at length in his comedy *Mandragola*, where he satirizes the Roman founding legend. Thus, given the importance that Livy attaches to Lucretia, Machiavelli's near-omission of Lucretia from his *Discourses on Livy* must be understood as a deliberate and calculated choice. This raises some interpretive questions. Given that most Roman historians, as well as medieval and Renaissance writers dealing with the topic, treat Lucretia as one of the protagonists of the uprising against the Tarquins, why does Machiavelli refuse to accord her such a role? What might be at stake in this deliberate disavowal of Lucretia in the *Discourses on Livy*?

Interpretive Path 1: Violence and Women's Agency

In Machiavelli's political and historical work, there is a near-systematic omission of women as perpetrators or targets of lethal violence. With a few exceptions, women neither inflict nor suffer the kind of lethal violence that Machiavelli persistently stylizes as a metonym for political action. In Machiavelli's work, violence is coded as female only in the mythic and allegorical world of the uncontrollable non-human forces *fortuna* and *necessità*, which are sometimes likened to violent actors, and where femininity serves as a prop for nature. In the politico-historical narrative, violence by or against women is marginal.

The historical record partly explains this omission. Battery and sexual assault notwithstanding, in the public world of Italian Renaissance cities, women tended to be neither perpetrators nor victims of socially recognized public forms of violence. With respect to legal violence and especially executions, Andrea Zorzi reports that in the high Renaissance, very few women were among those condemned to death.[30] (The persecution of witches did not start until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[31]) Those women who were executed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were primarily from the lower orders, belonging to the *popolo minuto*, and were typically executed for infanticide or for having killed their employers. And save for Caterina Sforza, the Countess of Forlì, women were rarely involved as actors in spectacular forms of political violence.

In the scholarship on Machiavelli, the absence of women as agents or patients of violence is largely addressed in terms of the categories of inclusion and exclusion. A number of feminist scholars have argued that Machiavelli explicitly or implicitly excludes women from the political space, rendering citizenship an exclusively masculine domain.[32] From this perspective, Machiavelli's rendition of the Lucretia story appears as a classic exclusion of women from political life, and a denial of their political agency. In contrast to Livy's Lucretia, who is a speaking and acting subject, and who dramatizes her suicide so as to compel her male relatives to seek justice for her death, Machiavelli's Lucretia is mute. The appropriate feminist response, then, is to recover and recuperate Lucretia's voice and agency, and to highlight her role and importance in the Roman revolution. On this reading, the critic's task is to show how Machiavelli's version of the events perpetuates a patriarchal viewpoint that has obscured the important contributions made by women to ancient and modern history. From this vantage point, Machiavelli's silence on Lucretia constitutes an erasure and incites a counter-history, one that accords representational space to Lucretia and acknowledges her importance, not just as object but as agentive subject, in igniting the Roman revolution.

Yet the interpretive claim on which such a reading is based—namely that Machiavelli shuts out women from politics—has come under significant criticism from a second strand of feminist research. These interpreters have contended that women are not simply excluded from the Machiavellian political world but selectively included on sexist terms.[33] This second group of scholars have argued that it is not *women* who are excluded from the Machiavellian political universe but *femininity*, and that women who successfully perform masculinity are, in fact, legible to Machiavelli as political agents. Scholars have pointed to various examples of women whom Machiavelli treats as skilful political actors: Dido, Caterina Sforza, Queen Giovanna of Naples, Queen Rosamund of the Longobards—all of whom are willing to kill or die in the pursuit of power.[34] Women, in other words, can be princes (or political actors); the point at issue is what is required for them to be recognized as such. From this angle, the appropriate question is not how to recover Lucretia's voice and agency, but rather to ask what the conditions are that make her unrecognizable as a political actor; or in more intentionalist language, what differentiates Lucretia from these other women—Dido, Caterina Sforza, Giovanna, Rosamund—that Machiavelli refuses to grant her the status of a female prince that he accords to the others?

Interpretive Path 2: The Economy of Male Honour

Hanna Pitkin rightly notes that it is incorrect to say that Machiavelli silences or simply bars women from the political world. She observes that Machiavelli's obvious and explicit contempt for women and femininity is accompanied by anxiety about the mysterious and dangerous powers he attributes to women.[35] Specifically, Pitkin notes that there are two archetypes of women that recur throughout his work: on the one hand, young and typically unmarried women, daughters, who are objectified as beautiful and as sexually desirable; on the other hand, older women, mothers, wives, and matrons, who are depicted as controlling access to young women and thus holding the key to promote or frustrate male pleasure and desire. Although she is married and a matron, Lucretia falls into the first category. Pitkin interprets Machiavelli's warning in *Discourses* 3:26 against women who wreck states as alluding to such women, whose mere presence makes men lose their heads.[36] Because of the seductive allure the male gaze projects onto them, they threaten masculine political actors' self-control and their mastery of their passions.[37] Pitkin further argues that Machiavelli depicts women as politically dangerous, because 'they are invested with other men's sense of honour'.[38] On this reading, women are always understood to be attached to one (or more) men: a father, husband, or brother, whose honour is invested in the woman's virtue. Circulating between men as props for male honour, women thus function as part of an economy of exchange.

Although Pitkin does not cite Lévi-Strauss, this is of course the latter's argument in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. According to Lévi-Strauss, the reciprocal exchange and circulation of women constitute a form of communication, in which women perform the role of signs within a heteronormative economy of male desire. But as Lévi-Strauss points out, women's bodies only become signs to the extent that the satisfaction of male sexual desire can be deferred.[39] From this perspective, the rape of Lucretia represents a breach of the protocols whereby women are exchanged; the revolt against the Tarquins seeks to re-establish the proper modalities of this exchange.

Yet if, as Pitkin suggests, Machiavelli's warning about the danger of women derives from his view of women as invested with other men's honour, the puzzle of why he sidelines the rape and suicide of Lucretia becomes even more acute: is Lucretia not the perfect manifestation of the depth and resilience of the economy of male honour that, according to Pitkin, is at the heart of Machiavelli's concerns? If Machiavelli urges his readers to beware

of the political complications of desire, precisely because he is anxious about the possessive claims men make over women, then would not the story of Lucretia be the quintessential paradigm of such a situation? Why, then, would Machiavelli repudiate the significance of this 'accident' and argue that it was entirely epiphenomenal to the Roman revolution?

If Pitkin is right about the economy of male honour and the exchange of women that it presupposes, the Lucretia story becomes more problematic from the perspective of feminist criticism. Indeed, one could argue that the uprising against the Tarquins was not so much a revolution as a reaffirmation of the patriarchal protocols whereby women are exchanged. Such an interpretation dovetails with some feminist scholarship on the Lucretia myth, which has long pointed to the *limited emancipatory potential* that Lucretia represents. Simone de Beauvoir, for example, notes that Lucretia typifies the restricted political roles assigned to women in the history of Western political thought. These roles include stirring up intrigues and setting off events that are subsequently directed and managed by men. In this tradition, she argues, women have served as 'pretexts' rather than independent and active participants who make positive contributions to political life. Lucretia's suicide, she writes, 'had no more than a symbolic value'.[40]

Beauvoir's argument suggests that rejecting Machiavelli's mute Lucretia for Livy's loquacious Lucretia merely reinscribes the role of women as pretexts and does not generate a vision of women as independent agents who actively shape the political world. The literary scholar Stephanie Jed has offered a brilliant analysis of how the humanist tradition that celebrates Lucretia's rape as a prologue for republican freedom reproduces what she calls 'chaste thinking'. By 'chaste thinking', Jed means a figure of thought that ties together the narrative of Lucretia's rape and the liberation of Rome from tyranny into a logical sequence of events.[41] Specifically, 'chaste thinking' authorizes the social logic that proceeds from chastity to rape and thence through corruption, suicide, and revenge to revolution. Chaste thinking involves a nostalgic representation of past freedoms, figured in the form of uncorrupted female virtue, that are subsequently compromised by tyrannical power (aka unbridled desire leading to rape). In such a narrative, the rape is a necessary moment, because it enables and justifies the constitution of republican power and freedom. Jed's critique of the Lucretia myth thus serves as a reminder, even more forceful than Beauvoir's, that glorifying Lucretia as a republican heroine is by no means innocent or any less patriarchal than disavowing her as Machiavelli does.

Interpretive Path 3: Ambivalence

Psychoanalytically informed feminists have contended that Machiavelli's representation of women is marked by ambivalence. Pitkin, for example, argues not only that the economy of honour shapes Machiavelli's understanding of women as property but that ambivalence, specifically concerning manhood and autonomy, fundamentally structures his thought.[42] While Pitkin does not draw out the implications of her claims concerning ambivalence for the Lucretia story and its narrative of rape and suicide, other scholars have. In her examination of the dead women that litter the history of European art and literature, Elisabeth Bronfen has argued that narrative and visual images of dead women always represent more than the literal image at hand. They are cultural symptoms, and 'articulate unconscious knowledge and unconscious desires in a displaced, recoded and translated manner'.[43] Such images always contain a figurative meaning that functions allegorically for the community of survivors. Put differently, narrative and visual representations of dead women never simply inspire grief. They also inspire anxiety and desire, and these are part of what makes such representations politically effective.

For the Lucretia myth, that ambivalence is especially notable in the visual representations of the rape and suicide in European art. From Titian's late sixteenth-century painting through Gentileschi's mid-seventeenth and Tiepolo's mid-eighteenth-century works, European artists represented the rape scene in a highly eroticized manner, Lucretia's transfixed gaze suggesting both fear and desire. It is also notable that artistic representations of Lucretia's suicide, from Cranach's and Luca Cambiaso's sixteenth-century paintings to Andrea Casali's eighteenth-century version, all depict her as topless as she plunges the dagger into her heart, even though neither the textual record nor the logic of the narrative would suggest that she bares her chest prior to killing herself.

These eroticized representations suggest that the myth functions not simply as a fable for the inherent moral superiority of republics over tyrannies but that it was designed (or at least read in Early Modern Europe) to arouse desire. Melissa Matthes spells out what this means for the Lucretia myth—as told by Livy, not Machiavelli:

> Although the story of the rape of Lucretia is ostensibly an account of how the republic is founded over a woman's dead body, there is also a way in which the spectre of Lucretia's raped body continues to haunt the new republic. In the trajectory of republican history, Lucretia's story, as itself historical object, is both recalled and repeated, and then forgotten and denied. Lucretia's raped body as

> well as her story remain taboo throughout the life of the republic because her sexual violation reminds her male kin of their own failed masculinity (they could not safeguard her) and of their own continued desires for sexual conquest (each would like to have the sexual and political power of the tyrant/rapist). Thus, there is in these republican renditions a recognized contagion between the recollection of the story of Lucretia's rape and the temptation that her violation represents. Indeed, although republicans do not themselves rape Lucretia, they found their citizenry on the recollection of the temptation that the spectacle of her violation recalls.[44]

For Matthes, then, Lucretia's rape and suicide is both recalled and forgotten, repeated and denied by narratives such as Livy's that extol Lucretia as a republican heroine. The Lucretia myth, Matthes suggests, both troubles republican masculinity and arouses men's unquenchable desire for sexual conquest. Matthes's provocative interpretation suggests that republican citizens derive pleasure from retelling the story of Lucretia—not the chaste pleasure of celebrating republican moral superiority, but the pleasure of re-living the temptation that the rape represents.

Interestingly, Matthes exempts Machiavelli from this charge. For Matthes, Machiavelli's refusal to participate in the Lucretia narrative on the terms set by Livy and other Roman historians is commendable. Rather than analysing what Machiavelli says about Lucretia in the *Discourses*, Matthes opts for a reading of *Mandragola* where she finds a retelling of the Lucretia story that 'return[s] agency to political actors'.[45] For Matthes, the comedic form of *Mandragola* serves to dispel some of the mythic power of the conjunction of sexual violence with political founding.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored, through the Lucretia narrative, the gendered dimension of Machiavelli's concern with violence and founding. I have shown that Machiavelli, unlike his Roman sources and Early Modern humanist contemporaries, downplays and deprecates Lucretia's role in the Roman revolution. I have argued that this trivialization of Lucretia's role is surprising for four reasons. First, Roman historians and Renaissance humanists generally glorified Lucretia's role in the overthrow of the monarchy, mythologizing Lucretia as a central founding figure. Second, Machiavelli offers conflicting accounts of Lucretia's rape in different chapters of the *Discourses*. Third, Machiavelli celebrates Brutus's execution of his sons as a key moment for founding the republic while simultaneously dismissing Lucretia's suicide,

which in many ways parallels Brutus's actions. Finally, we might expect Machiavelli to treat Lucretia as exemplary of the illegitimate violence of tyranny and the uprising that ensued as a prologue to reinstating the sexual virtue that Machiavelli, following his humanist sources, associates with republican government. I thus regard Machiavelli's minimization of Lucretia as a deliberate disavowal and inquire into the meaning of this particular move.

Through engaging with the feminist literature on Machiavelli and Livy, I have reviewed a number of possible explanations for this disavowal. Machiavelli's silence on Lucretia could simply be an instance of a broader patriarchal tendency to exclude women from the political sphere, or to include them on sexist terms. Contrariwise, his refusal to engage with the myth could amount to a rejection of the moral logic whereby rape and political foundings are intertwined, such that 'rape authorizes revenge; revenge comprises revolution; revolution establishes legitimate government'.[46] Finally, Machiavelli's representation of Lucretia may be designed to interrupt the ambivalent compulsion to tell and to forget, to enact and to suppress the violence and the desire that accompanies it.

I do not propose these various interpretive approaches as possible resolutions, as I am not persuaded that any of them adequately explains the text or is consistent with Machiavelli's explicit claims elsewhere. 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 to norms of representation in feminist historiography.

Notes

1. Aside from the figures named as 'most excellent' princes in Chapter 6 of *The Prince*—Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus—the list of founders would include, at the very least, Lucius Junius Brutus, the founder of the Roman republic, whom Machiavelli exalts in the *Discourses*; the historical and mythical founders of ancient cities, such as Aeneas, Lycurgus, and Solon; the empire-builder Alexander the Great; the founder of the Roman religion, Numa Pompilius; the Greek tyrants Agathocles, Nabis, and Hiero of Syracuse; as well as the more complicated instances of contemporary princes such as Cesare Borgia, Castruccio Castracani, and Francesco Sforza.
2. See Hanna F. Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 55.

3. See Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 180.
4. See Yves Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
5. See Yves Winter, 'Machiavelli and the Rape of Lucretia', *History of Political Thought* 40, no. 3 (2019), 405–32. While both the present chapter and the article cited deal with the puzzle of Machiavelli's disavowal of Lucretia, they do so from different perspectives. The present essay emphasizes the problem of founding violence, and the gendered norms whereby some forms of violence count as political whereas others are not recognized as such.
6. See Maria J. Falco, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Niccolò Machiavelli* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004); Michelle T. Clarke, 'On the Woman Question in Machiavelli', *Review of Politics* 67, no. 2 (2005), 229–55; Barbara Spackman, 'Machiavelli and Gender', in *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. John M. Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 223–38.
7. My interpretation focuses on Livy's rendition, both because classicists regard his version as an artistic and dramatic masterpiece and because his history constituted Machiavelli's most significant source. See P. G. Walsh, *Livy: His Historical Aims and Methods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 214–18; R. M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy: Books 1–5* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 219; S. N. Philippides, 'Narrative Strategies and Ideology in Livy's "Rape of Lucretia"', *Helios* 10, no. 7 (1983), 113.
8. Livy, *History of Rome* 2:1. All Latin citations are from vol. 1 of the Loeb edition, ed. Benjamin O. Foster et al. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919–59); translations from Titus Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, tr. Aubrey de Sélincourt (London: Penguin, 2002).
9. 'Tarquinium mala libido Lucretiae per vim stuprandae capit; cum forma tum spectata castitas incitat': *History* 1:57.
10. '[C]eterum corpus est tantum violatum, animus insons; mors testis erit, sed date dexteras fidemque haud inpune adultero fore. Sextus est Tarquinius, qui hostis pro hospite priore nocte vi armatus mihi sibique, si vos viri estis, pestiferum hinc abstulit gaudium': *History* 1:58.
11. *History* 1:59.
12. '[N]on acrior vindex libertatis fuerat quam deinde custos fuit': *History* 2:1.
13. '[A]dulescentes aliquot … quorum in regno libido solutior fuerat, … adsueti more regio vivere': *History* 2:3.
14. '[C]onspectius eo quod poenae capiendae ministerium patri de liberis consulatus imposuit, et qui spectator erat amovendus, eum ipsum fortuna exactorem supplicii dedit': *History* 2:5.

15. For references to the expulsion of the Tarquins in the *Discourses*, see *Disc.* 1:3, 9, 16, 17, 25, 28, 32, 58; 3:5, 7, 26.
16. '[P]rima causa del tenere libera Roma': *Disc.* 1:4: Machiavelli, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Mario Martelli (Florence: Sansoni, 1971), 82. All citations of the *Discorsi* are from this edition (henceforth *Opere*). Translation from Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, tr. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 16. All translations of *Discorsi* are from this version.
17. '[L]eggi e ordini in beneficio della publica libertà': ibid.
18. '[N]on fu mai tolta la libertà da alcuno suo cittadino': *Disc.* 1:28, *Opere* 110; tr. Mansfield and Tarcov, 63.
19. '[I]nimico del nome regio, ed amatore della gloria e del bene commune della sua patria': *Disc.* 1:58, *Opere* 141; tr. Mansfield and Tarcov, 117.
20. '[I]l che testifica, tutti gli ordini primi di quella città essere stati più conformi a uno vivere civile e libero, che a uno assoluto e tirannico': *Disc.* 1:9, *Opere* 91; tr. Mansfield and Tarcov, 30. The claim in *Disc.* 1:9 that the Romans did not create new institutions conflicts with the praise Machiavelli showers on the Romans in *Disc.* 1:25 for inventing the position of 'sacrificing king' ('Re Sacrificulo'): a religious official, subordinate to the high priest, who was royal only in name but could carry out the annual sacrifice that, according to custom, was reserved for the king.
21. '[P]er *alcuno accidente … dopo* la cacciata de' Tarquinii': *Disc.* 1:16, *Opere* 99 (emphasis added); tr. Mansfield and Tarcov, 44. *Disc.* 1:17 similarly refers to Roman freedom as emerging after the Tarquins' expulsion: 'When the Tarquins were expelled, Rome could at once take and maintain its freedom' ('Roma … cacciati i Tarquinii, poté subito prendere e mantenere quella libertà': *Opere* 101; tr. Mansfield and Tarcov, 47).
22. '[N]on ci è più potente rimedio, né più valido né più sicuro né più necessario, che ammazzare i figliuoli di Bruto': *Disc.* 1:16, *Opere* 100; tr. Mansfield and Tarcov, 45.
23. See especially *Disc.* 3:3, appropriately titled 'That It Is Necessary to Kill the Sons of Brutus If One Wishes to Maintain a Newly Acquired Freedom' ('Come egli è necessario, a volere mantenere una libertà acquistata di nuovo, ammazzare i figliuoli di Bruto': *Opere* 198; tr. Mansfield.and Tarcov, 214).
24. '[R]itirarono la Republica romana verso il suo principio': *Disc.* 3:1, *Opere* 195; tr. Mansfield and Tarcov, 210.
25. '[P]adre della romana libertà': *Disc.* 3:1, *Opere* 197; tr. Mansfield and Tarcov, 212.
26. 'Haec Lucretiam Bruto aequavit, nescias an et praetulerit: quoniam Brutus non posse servire a femina didicit': Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, 1:320:

Patrologia Latina 23 (Paris: Garnier, 1883), 194; tr. from Jerome, *Letters and Select Works*, tr. W. H. Fremantle (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 1:49.

27. 'Non fu, adunque, cacciato costui per avere Sesto suo figliuolo stuprata Lucrezia, ma per avere rotte le leggi del regno, e governatolo tirannicamente; … E se lo accidente di Lucrezia non fosse venuto, come prima ne fosse nato un altro, arebbe partorito il medesimo effetto': *Disc.* 3:5, *Opere* 199; tr. Mansfield and Tarcov, 217.
28. '[N]on furono cacciati altri che i Tarquinii, fuora della offensione di qualunque altro': *Disc.* 3:7, *Opere* 211; tr. Mansfield and Tarcov, 236.
29. 'Come per cagione di femine si rovina uno stato': *Disc.* 3:26, *Opere* 232.
30. Andrea Zorzi, 'Le esecuzioni delle condanne a morte a Firenze nel tardo medievo tra repressione penale e ceremoniale pubblico', in *Simbolo e realtà della vita urbana nel tardo medioevo*, ed. Massimo Miglio and Giuseppe Lombardi (Rome: Vecchiarelli, 1993), 153–253, 176.
31. See Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983); Guido Ruggiero, *Binding Passions: Tales of Magic, Marriage, and Power at the End of the Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
32. See Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 6–7; Wendy Brown, *Manhood and Politics: A Feminist Reading in Political Theory* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1988), 115–17; Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Women and War* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 56–9.
33. See Arlene W. Saxonhouse, *Women in the History of Political Thought: Ancient Greece to Machiavelli* (New York: Praeger, 1985); John Juncholl Shin, 'Beyond Virtù', in *Feminist Interpretations of Niccolò Machiavelli*, 287–308.
34. See Sebastian de Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 134; Jo Ann Cavallo, 'Machiavelli and Women', in *Seeking Real Truths: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Machiavelli*, ed. Patricia Vilches and Gerald Seaman (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 123–47; Clarke, 'On the Woman Question'.
35. Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman*, 110.
36. Ibid., 115.
37. Ibid., 5.
38. Ibid., 118.

39. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, ed. Rodney Needham, tr. James Harle Bell and John Richard von Sturmer (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969), 62–3.
40. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, tr. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Vintage, 2011), 150.
41. Stephanie H. Jed, *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 8.
42. Pitkin, *Fortune Is a Woman*, 5.
43. Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), xi.
44. Melissa M. Matthes, *The Rape of Lucretia and the Founding of Republics* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 6.
45. Matthes, *The Rape of Lucretia*, 174.
46. Coppélia Kahn, 'Lucrece: The Sexual Politics of Subjectivity', in *Rape and Representation*, ed. Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 141–59, 141.