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# The Rape of Lucrece

## Guilt, Power and Sacrifice

Guadalupe García\*  
Universidad del Salvador  
Argentina

In Rome, while men devoted their lives to the army, women were devoted to their household, as they were the governors of their homes. Shakespeare's Lucrece was a noble Roman lady, who was firstly desired and finally raped by Tarquin, the Prince.

Tarquin was not only the Prince, but also the leader of the Roman army, before becoming a rapist too. From the beginning of the poem we can define him as a conqueror. As the leader of the army, he would be part of the conquest of other territories, but he would soon seize another land which was in another man's hands.

Working with an ecocritic and ecofeministic approach, it is crucial to point out some important facts. Nature is seen as less valuable, opposed to men, who are seen as highly valuable and also as the ones who can rule over nature. He is superior to nature and he is completely alienated from it. He is a colonizer who turned our land, which is the source of life, into something that must be conquered and exploited. He will exert patriarchal violence not only against nature, but also against women, who both, in his eyes, belong to a lower realm. He will master both of them. This aggression towards nature is considered as aggression towards women.

The whole Roman army was sieging Ardea, when Tarquin noticed about Lucrece and her chastity, which would turn him into a predator and would make of poor Lucrece a prey. During this event, Tarquin and Collatine would commence a game of toxic male rivalry that would lead to a tragic end. Collatine, like Tarquin, was a soldier, and both would fight in order to wrestle lands and territories away from others. It would not be deranged to think that soldiers are predators, who are trained to be animals, to develop their natural instincts, and to be faster in order to be the winner. We could also consider Collatine and Tarquin as predators who struggle for the "territory" that Lucrece is. However, the fact that Tarquin is a predator is not because he is a soldier. Soldiers must share moral values and ethical principles, that will make the final national goal possible. This objective is national well-being for every citizen, and that includes solidarity and security.

In this narrative poem by Shakespeare, Tarquin does not share the values and principles that are mentioned before. He does not protect people, he attacks them. This might come from the fact that he feels omnipotent, almighty, and he does not have any military values, such as respect, honor or loyalty. As a soldier, Tarquin is a betrayer.

*"Perchance that envy of so rich a thing, Braving compare, disdainfully did sting  
His high-pitch'd thoughts, that meaner men should vaunt  
That golden hap which their superiors want."*

Tarquin is the one eager to compete, to conquer what Collatine possessed. The prince, now

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\* Licenciada en Lengua Inglesa por la Universidad del Salvador. Correo electrónico: [garcia.guadalupe@usal.edu.ar](mailto:garcia.guadalupe@usal.edu.ar)  
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turned into a greedy conqueror, makes the land his property, leaving his flag and making everyone acknowledge that it — not a she anymore — bears his name. Not only her husband but any other man, will acknowledge his ownership.

*“Her breasts, like ivory globes circled with blue, A pair of maiden worlds unconquered,  
Save of their lord no bearing yoke they knew, And him by oath they truly honoured.  
These worlds in Tarquin new ambition bred;  
Who, like a foul usurper, went about  
From this fair throne to heave the owner out.”*

Lucrece becomes an entity with no feelings or decisions of her own from the very moment the Prince steps into her house. As she becomes ‘nature’, she becomes passive, non-agent. Lucrece is the land where the action will take place, specially the brave fight that soldiers will carry out. We can say that she will be part of a “lower realm”, one that will be alienated from the cultural realm, and that is why it will be so easy to force and control.

According to Val Plumwood in *“Feminism and the Mastery of Nature”*, *“an associated move is the identification of the human with the higher, mental capabilities and of the animal or natural with the lower bodily ones, and the identification of the authentic or fully human sphere with the mental sphere”*.

Women and land are seen as passive and therefore systematically backgrounded and inferiorised, while men are viewed as active. They are able to dominate and force nature. According to Plumwood, *“women are ‘the environment’. They provide not only the environment but the conditions against which male ‘achievement’ takes place”*. What women do is never accounted as achievement. Women are considered to be part of the natural realm, since carrying a child in the womb is natural, breastfeeding is natural. Thinking is not an activity that belongs to this “natural realm”, therefore women are considered unable to perform it. It is believed that thinking is not a female activity. However, if women are only competent enough to perform what we can call “natural” activities only, it would be pertinent to ask if household chores are also considered to be natural? The answer is absolutely not. Women not only have to do what men find unsuitable for them to do, but also excel at it because, doing it right is a sign of their worth.

When Tarquin felt that he would encounter resistance from Lucrece’s part, he knew he had to tame her — like an animal — and control her by telling her that he would make up a story about her and a slave if she opposed his will. Lucrece’s chastity reminds us of a virgin land, a piece of territory that has not been exploited and polluted. Both Lucrece and land are subjugated.

This false lord, as Shakespeare depicted Tarquin, knew that what he was doing was an evil deed. While Tarquin was marching to Lucrece’s chamber in order to occupy another man’s territory, nature was telling him not to do it. As the soldier he was, he had to retreat.

*“As each unwilling portal yields him way,  
Through little vents and crannies of the place  
The wind wars with his torch to make him stay,  
And blows the smoke of it into his face”*

Tarquin is the lurking wolf, while Lucrece is the little and innocent lamb. Before capturing his prey, his senses were intensified, and the sight and smell were essential. Lucrece is described in detail. The way in which he describes the colour of her skin and the shape of her body is so specific that it seems that she is being watched by the predator, who is measuring his movements in order to seize its prey.

*“Now stole upon the time the dead of night,  
When heavy sleep had closed up mortal eyes:*

*No comfortable star did lend his light,  
No noise but owls' and wolves' death-boding cries;  
Now serves the season that they may surprise  
The silly lambs: pure thoughts are dead and still,  
While lust and murder wake to stain and kill."*

It is worthwhile mentioning the fourth entry of a definition for rape by Merriam Webster Dictionary: "*Rape: the pomace of grapes left after expression of the juice*". Lucrece was used and then discarded, such as the grapes after they are crushed in order to produce wine. Tarquin says:

*"What win I, if I gain the thing I seek?  
A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy.  
Who buys a minute's mirth to wail a week?  
Or sells eternity to get a toy?"*  
**For one sweet grape who will the vine destroy?"**

Lucrece was not treated as a human being. Women are treated as the Other, we are not a complete self. The state of completeness can be obtained with a man by our side, who, in our childhood, can be our father, while, in our adulthood, our husband will play the role of the alpha, the one who will protect his 'possession' from the imminent 'attack' of other alpha. We are incompetent as we cannot take care of ourselves. Again, we are passive, while men are active.

Women are the Other, and men are the Self, as they are a complete human being. Men do not need women to achieve the state of completeness: Eve was made from one of Adam's ribs. We can conceive this as a male labour. Men want to be creators themselves, although they do not have a womb, a matrix by nature. That is why, in order to achieve that, men will feel the need to deprive women and nature of their integrity and dignity, so as to make them malleable and control them. Maria Mies says in *Feminist Research: Science, Violence and Responsibility*: "*For men, nature is by no means an asexual being, it is a woman, an evil, dangerous woman who must be dominated.*"

Tarquin felt completely omnipotent, not only to exert control over Rome, but over another human being.

*"Thus he replies: 'The colour in thy face, That even for anger makes the lily pale,  
And the red rose blush at her own disgrace,  
Shall plead for me and tell my loving tale:  
Under that colour am I come to scale  
Thy never-conquer'd fort: **the fault is thine,**  
For those thine eyes betray thee unto mine."*

She was guilty of being chaste, of being beautiful, of tempting him. His sin was also her sin. She felt guilty, not only because she could not prevent Tarquin's evil deed from happening, but also because her husband's reputation was tarnished. Lucrece felt that an intruder destroyed what she had taken care of, such as her home, her family and, of course, her and her husband's honor.

*"If, Collatine, thine honour lay in me,  
From me by strong assault it is bereft.  
My honour lost, and I, a drone-like bee,  
Have no perfection of my summer left,  
But robb'd and ransack'd by injurious theft:  
In thy weak hive a wandering wasp hath crept,  
And suck'd the honey which thy chaste bee kept."*

The exploitation of the land is Lucrece being abused by Tarquin. She is not treated as "*bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh*". This control, that Tarquin exerts over her, deprives her of her humanity,

leaving her at the same level of a beast. In spite of, being completely devastated, Lucrece achieves justice by means of her body. She retrieves her dignity and prevents Rome's doom, but of course her revenge is not carried out by herself, but by male agents acting in her name. She is not able to achieve it by her own means, because, as a woman, she is incompetent.

Simone de Beauvoir stated: "*the tragedy of being a woman consisted not only in having one's life and choices impoverished and limited, but also in the fact that to be a good woman was to be a second-rate human being.*"

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