Friend and Foe: Monarchism, Republicanism, and Civil Conflict in *Rape of Lucrece*

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Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece* (1594) is often omitted from discussions of his Roman works, and dismissed as relatively unimportant within his oeuvre. However, the poem demonstrates sophisticated artistry: Shakespeare forges metaphorical connections between individual psychology and the state of the body politic, and uses symbolism and language to support and enhance the messages of the poem. Moreover, the poem delivers nuanced and complicated comments upon Elizabethan political issues, such as anxiety about stability and succession, debates about the merits of monarchism and republicanism, and concerns about internal disagreements in the court. Of course, it is not difficult to see why the poem has often been overlooked. Upon first reading, the political element of *Lucrece* seems to be almost entirely absent. Katherine Eisaman Maus writes in her introduction that Shakespeare's retelling of the classical story of Lucrece 'downplays—though it does not eliminate—the political aspects of the story'.[1]

Indeed, until recent times Shakespeare's politics in general have not received much critical attention: Armitage, Condren, and Fitzmaurice note that 'until recently, literary scholars have not generally treated Shakespeare as a participant in the political thought of his time, unlike his contemporaries Ben Jonson, Edmund Spenser and Philip Sidney.'[2] Interpretations of *Lucrece* as a relatively apolitical work are not surprising. Unlike Livy, who as Robert Miola notes 'places the rape in its historical context' and allows it to occupy 'no more than one fifth of the narrative' with 'no special emphasis',[3] Shakespeare focuses almost entirely on the rape and Lucrece's reaction to it, and includes less direct political commentary in his story than either Livy or, his other source, Ovid. Shakespeare explicitly mentions the political ramifications of the rape only in the short Argument and in a few lines at the end of the poem. He appears entirely more interested in the personal psychology involved in the act than its political ramifications. However, this reluctance to discuss the politics behind the event seems odd for a number of reasons. First, Lucrece's story has intense political consequences. Lucrece, much more so than other Roman female victims such as Leda, is irretrievably tangled up in politics. The story of a member of the royal family raping a woman and subsequently inviting the overthrow of the monarchy is inherently political. Moreover, Elizabethan audiences would have expected Roman stories to contain political advice. For the Elizabethans, the Romans' 'advice and examples pointed the way to a better, richer, and fuller life' (Miola, p. 10). An Elizabethan audience would automatically search for political wisdom and advice in a Roman work. They connected their own society with that of the Romans: as Barbara Parker writes, 'Rome was...a political exemplus for England.'[4] Quentin Skinner further notes that Elizabethans looked to Rome's political history for guidance regarding 'the best state of the commonwealth'[5] and Armitage et al add that the

they 'took the *studia humanitatis*, the classical corpus of texts on history, moral philosophy, rhetoric, grammar and poetry as their guide to political life' (Armitage et al, p. 3). Therefore, a Roman work entirely devoid of any political advice would be surprising. Moreover, despite the lack of explicit political comment in the poem, Shakespeare creates what Vivian Thomas calls 'an intense sense of a social universe'[6] in the poem. This strong sense of the interconnections, shared values and identity among the poem's major characters invites consideration and interpretation of their society's collective values and organisation. Thus, although *Lucrece* may appear at first glance to be an apolitical work, it is worth taking a closer look to discern its underlying political themes.

Despite the lack of explicit comment, political themes do in fact echo throughout *Lucrece*. Cathy Shrank writes that 'the theme of succession permeates Shakespeare's oeuvre',[7] and indeed, Shakespeare builds anxiety about succession and stability into the text by connecting Lucrece symbolically to her city and demonstrating the chaos that follows the overthrow of established order. Shakespeare explores the merits and dangers of both monarchism and republicanism, a highly topical discussion in a society facing an uncertain future, and one known to debate the 'best state of a commonwealth'.[8] However, although Shakespeare provides plenty of fodder for political debate, he does not clearly endorse either monarchy or republicanism. Moreover, rather than endorsing a political system, his main emphasis is on the perils of civil discord. This message would also have been relevant to the Elizabethans. Indeed, Parker writes,

> At the time *Lucrece* was written, England's political milieu notably resembled the poem's...the Court was dominated by faction—by the Essex-Cecil rivalry for control not simply of policy but of the Queen herself. In addition, the unsettled succession, compounded by Elizabeth's age, heightened fears of a coup preceding her death, or a contest for the Crown after it. Either was likely to provoke civil war (Parker, p. 48)

In *Lucrece* Shakespeare evokes this uncertain political climate by focusing on civil, or internal, conflict. He calls to mind the internal overthrow of the Roman monarchy in favour of a republic in *Lucrece* by permeating the poem with the theme of internal disagreement and contradiction. Through symbolism and metaphor, the actions and gender relationships of the characters, and paradoxical language, the text illustrates a society that defeats itself from within, drawing attention to the perils of civil conflict and internal strife. Rather than using the poem to endorse a particular political position, Shakespeare demonstrates the pitfalls that can befall any system when it does not respect its component individuals, and when the members of the society work against each other and even against themselves. In a society with no clear heir to the throne, where advisors jostled for influence over the Queen, where religious tensions were mounting, and where the court was rife with factions, Shakespeare's emphasis on the dangers of civil conflict was highly relevant. Thus, although upon first reading *Lucrece* seems to pointedly avoid political discussion, Shakespeare's subtle and nuanced discussion of political ideals in the poem allows him to explore complex political ideas and present strong political comments without simply taking a 'side' in the contemporary debate between monarchism and republicanism.

Although the political themes in *Lucrece* are not immediately obvious, Shakespeare invites his readers to remember the political consequences of the rape by metaphorically connecting Lucrece's rape to the fall of a city. This metaphor clearly ties Lucrece's rape to its consequence, the fall of monarchical Rome. Shakespeare develops this metaphor in several ways. Firstly, he refers to Lucrece as a city and gives her civic attributes. For example, Shakespeare calls Lucrece's superiority 'sov'reignty' (line 36), and the red and white in her face 'heraldry' (line 64). He describes her as a 'fair throne' (413) a 'sweet city' (469), and a 'consecrated wall' (723), and depicts her breasts as 'maiden worlds unconquered' (408),

'round turrets' (441), and an 'ivory wall' (464). Secondly, Shakespeare characterises the rape as a siege of this 'sweet city' (469). Shakespeare emphasises the political and military characteristics of Tarquin's sexual act. Tarquin uses martial imagery to convince himself to rape Lucrece and justifies himself by saying 'Affection is my captain' (271), and 'Desire my pilot is, beauty my prize' (279). Furthermore, the poem characterises the rape as a treasonous conquest, describing it as 'treason' (369), 'mutiny' (426), and 'insurrection' (722), and Tarquin as a 'usurper' (412). Finally, Shakespeare reinforces the connection between the rape and the fall of a city by comparing it to the Fall of Troy though the extended *ekphrasis* of the painting of the siege of Troy. For example, Lucrece sees the strong parallels between the 'weeping tear[s]' (1375) of the Trojans and her own sorrow; the 'lust' of 'fond Paris' (1473) and the lust of Tarquin; and the 'borrowed tears' of Sinon (1549) and Tarquin's deceptive appearance. Shakespeare compares Lucrece to Troy overtly when Lucrece says, 'As Priam him did cherish,/So did I Tarquin, so my Troy did perish' (1546-7). Shakespeare's language thus subtly reintroduces the seemingly absent politics into the poem.

However, uncovering the poem's ultimate political message remains complicated. Shakespeare is limited by the subject matter: *Lucrece* has to end with the establishment of a republic, and Shakespeare can only choose what to emphasise, and how to represent the action. It is difficult to discern a clear political message since strains of both monarchical and republican thinking are evident. Indeed, for much of the poem Shakespeare appears to be negotiating between the two systems. Throughout the poem, Shakespeare enacts a debate between monarchism and republicanism, which has led to the poem being claimed by thinkers on both sides. Indeed, critical opinions about Shakespeare's political ideas about monarchism and republicanism differ among scholars, and have varied widely over time. For example, traditionally scholars have assumed that Shakespeare and his contemporaries were all avowed monarchists. E.M.W. Tillyard asserts, for instance, that 'from [Shakespeare's] repetitive and indifferently arranged stanzas...can be extracted the contemporary notion of order' and that this 'order which prevails in the heavens is duplicated on earth, the king corresponding to the sun.'[9] For the Elizabethans, Tillyard contends, '*le roi soleil* is only a part of a larger sequence of leadership, which included: God among the angels...the sun among the stars, fire among the elements, the king in the state, the head in the body...' (p. 15). Shakespeare does exhibit characteristics of this 'general conception of order',[10] in which everything is connected by 'correspondences' (p. 95) and a 'chain of being' (p. 33), in *Lucrece* when he demonstrates the 'correspondence' of the conflict between Tarquin and Lucrece and conflict in the body politic. However, to assume that all educated people firmly believed that the monarch ruled 'though the direct appointment of God' (*Shakespeare's History Plays*, p. 65) and aimed to preserve 'the sanctity of monarchy' (p. 67) ignores a large part of the Elizabethan historical context. In fact, as Eric Nelson notes, 'political thought in Shakespeare's Europe organised itself to a significant degree around the question of what constituted, in Cicero's words 'the best state of a commonwealth''' (Nelson, 253). Indeed, this question was a rhetorical commonplace. As Skinner writes,

> a common *topos* concerned the best state of a commonwealth. Is it preferable to live as the subject of a monarch or as the citizen of a republic or 'free state'? The question is posed in the title of More's *Utopia*, which tells us that the book will consider the problem of the *optimus status reipublicae*. (Skinner, p. 273)

Indeed, there were strong voices on both the monarchist and republican sides: for example, in 'Book II of the *Discourses on Livy,* Machiavelli announces that 'experience shows that cities have never increased in dominion or wealth, unless they have been free' (Nelson, p. 253), whereas 'according to [Jean] Bodin, it is in the nature of republics, rather than monarchies, to

repress virtue, because the rise of a virtuous man is a threat to the rule of the mediocre' (Nelson, p. 255).

Many years after Tillyard, following relative silence on Shakespeare's politics, critics began discussing the political implications of his works. As Armitage et al write, 'a few germinal essays appeared in the 1980s placing Shakespeare's works within historical discourses of republicanism, monarchism and resistance theory' (Armitage, Condren, & Fitzmauric, p. 2). For example, Jonathan Dollimore writes a Marxist interpretation of Shakespeare, and argues that that 'Tillyard's world picture, to the extent that it did still exist, was not shared by all; it was an ideological legitimation of an existing social order, one rendered the more necessary by the apparent instability, actual *and* imagined, of that order.'[11] Later still, Andrew Hadfield echoes aspects of Dollimore's argument in asserting that the 'existing social order' in the Early Modern period was not so stable as Tillyard suggests, writing in *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* that 'the over-riding political issue of the time [c. 1600] was the question of sovereignty and the legitimacy of the monarch.'[12] In reality Elizabeth's right to rule was often contested, and she 'was declared a heretic, and, therefore, a usurper by the Catholic church, and there was considerable opposition to her reign in Europe as well as in Britain' (Hadfield, p. 2).

Although many Elizabethans accepted monarchy as 'a divinely ordained institution' and believed that 'it was the duty of subjects to obey the monarch without question because everyone and everything had its place in the natural order of things' (Hadfield, p. 6), several of Elizabeth's subjects nevertheless criticised absolutist monarchy, including Henry Wriothesley, the Earl of Southampton, to whom *Lucrece* is dedicated: '*Lucrece* was designed to appeal to Southampton's political leanings and persuasions. Wriothesley was...developing "the anti-absolutist ideas and oppositional views of history" that were "openly discussed"... in the mid 1590s' (p. 112). Of course, it is not necessarily that simple. Barbara Parker suggests that the dedication to Wriothesley actually serves as a warning against aligning himself with anti-Elizabethan forces (p. 51). Eric Nelson also argues that though Hadfield's view is 'reputable, 'there are, however, several features of the poem that sit uncomfortably with this reading.' (p. 257). Armitage et al further note that 'Analyses that seek to show where Shakespeare stood on matters of hegemony, social justice, equality and other markers of commitment have themselves largely been exercises of ideological enlistment or subversion' (p. 21). Indeed, despite interesting critical work on *Lucrece,* firmly discerning one particular political position in the poem proves very difficult.

Indeed, strains of both monarchism are clearly evident in *Lucrece.* The heroine's metaphorical connection with the fallen city, the final emphasis on Tarquin's individual banishment rather than the establishment of a republic, as well as Lucrece's political beliefs and her own connection with Elizabeth through her chastity and her Tudor 'rose' complexion (Parker, p. 40) all support monarchical ideals. Moreover, given the metaphorical linking of Lucrece to monarchical Rome, the fall of this 'city' occurs when she is raped and commits suicid, a tragic succession of events which suggests that the fall of monarchical Rome is similarly undesirable. Shakespeare also arguably downplays the establishment of the republic at the end of the poem; although he strongly evokes the fall of the monarchy, he does not pay much attention to its alternative. He neglects to mention 'republic' at the end, simply informing the reader that Tarquin individually is banished, asserting that 'The Romans plausibly did give consent/To Tarquin's everlasting banishment' (1855-56). In the Argument, Shakespeare states that after the rape 'the state government changed from kings to consuls' but his choice not to mention this change in political system in the final lines suggests a reluctance to emphasise republican values. Finally, Lucrece herself believes in a divinely-ordained monarchy. She says to Tarquin, 'Thou seem'st not what thou art, a god, a king,/For kings like gods should govern everything' (601-2). These lines connect the king's

power with divine power, evoking a belief in the divine right of kings where the right to rule comes from God not from the people. Since Lucrece is the heroine of the poem, her belief that monarchy is divinely-ordained may imply a monarchical stance in the poem.

However, although monarchical messages are clearly present, they are also matched or even exceeded by republican ideas. Anne Barton writes that in Shakespeare's Roman plays, 'he looked attentively at the young Roman republic delineated by Plutarch and Livy, and chose to emphasise what was hopeful, communal and progressive in it.'[13] Indeed, Shakespeare supports republican ideals in *Lucrece* through its royal villain, Lucrece's assertion of the importance of responsible leadership, and Shakespeare's implication in the Argument that the will of the people should be the ultimate authority. Tarquin is the only representative of the monarchy in the poem, and he is clearly the villain. Moreover, his royalty makes him proud and he is insulted that a lower man should have the best wife:

> envy of so rich a thing,
> Braving compare, disdainfully did sting
> His high-pitched thoughts, that meaner men should vaunt
> That golden hap which their superiors want. (39-42)

Hadfield suggests that Shakespeare uses Tarquin to illustrate the 'perils of monarchy' and to show that 'inside every ruler lurks a tyrant waiting to escape' (p. 152). Indeed, Tarquin demonstrates the danger of a ruler with absolute power. He also illustrates the pitfalls of the ideals of chivalry: as we will see later, his *virtus* combats Lucrece's chastity. Of course, even Tarquin acknowledges that his royalty does not give him any right to Collatine's wife; however, his feelings of superiority are a strong stimulus for the rape. With Tarquin, Shakespeare explores monarchy's dangerous potential to turn into tyranny. The poem also exhibits republican ideas when Lucrece decides that rulers should be responsible to the people and asserts, 'But happy monarchs still are feared for love' (611). Hadfield argues that in lines 601-611 Lucrece speculates 'on what Tarquin might do when he has become king if he is prepared to act so badly before he has assumed power. The implications of this train of thought undermine the premise with which she started. If kings need to be suitable for their office, then they have no absolute right to rule'.[14] Lucrece, therefore, is as much a spokeswoman for republicanism as for monarchy. Shakespeare creates further sympathy for republicanism when he mentions in the Argument that the people's will should be the ultimate authority, writing that Superbus took power 'contrary to the Roman laws and customs, not requiring or staying for the people's suffrages' (1). Moreover, Shakespeare describes the rape as 'treason' in lines 361 and 368. To refer to Tarquin's acts as treason and to call Tarquin a 'usurper' (412) suggests that true allegiance to the state rests in fidelity to the will and laws of the people. As Hadfield writes,'[Tarquin's] actions cannot be defined as treason while he rules Rome, and his crime only emerges retrospectively with the establishment of the republic and his acceptance that sovereignty resides with the people' (*Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics*, p. 116). Shakespeare's use of the words 'usurper' and 'treason' to describe Tarquin and the rape implies that the people and the laws, rather than the monarch, are sovereign and hold the ultimate authority.

It is important to exercise caution in assigning Shakespeare a political stripe: Shakespeare presents different opinions which can be misinterpreted if taken out of context. As John Joughin comments, 'over the last four hundred years the playwright has been adopted by almost every faith, political hue and persuasion'.[15] However, it is clear that contrary to Tillyard's traditional view, it would have been topical for Shakespeare to consider such questions as the source of a ruler's legitimacy, or the best political system. Discussions about the merits of various political systems were ripe in 1593, and indeed, Shakespeare's themes in *Lucrece* directly address many of the debates which occurred around him. Of course, an analysis of *Lucrece* alone is not enough to prove its author's political persuasion,

especially since Shakespeare's political views have consistently eluded scholars to the degree that some believe that 'it is doubtful, in any case, that the whole of Shakespeare's work contains any real doctrinal development, even less any ideological unity'.[16]

However, the difficulty of ascertaining Shakespeare's personal politics does not trivialise a discussion of the political messages of a particular work. Indeed, *Lucrece* enacts many of the political debates circling about Shakespeare in 1593. At times, Shakespeare appears to be advancing arguments in favour of monarchism; at other times, republicanism. Critics such as Hadfield clearly conclude that 'Shakespeare's treatment of Roman material in his early work shows distinct evidence of republican leanings' (*Shakespeare and Republicanism,* p. 111). Other critics, such as Blair Worden, assert that 'it would be as surprising to find a Renaissance playwright hoping for democracy as it would be to find a modern playwright arguing against it. It would be no less surprising to find a Renaissance playwright questioning the institution of monarchy.'[17] Worden further contends that 'in Shakespeare's England there was admiration for classical (and aristocratic) republican virtue, but no suggestion that England could or should become a republic' (p. 28-29). Hadfield sees clear republicanism in *Lucrece* and Shakespeare's Roman works; Worden sees obvious monarchism. This difference of opinion is not surprising given the ambiguity of the Shakespeare's political messages in the poem. Indeed, in *Lucrece* Shakespeare alternately seems to support both monarchism and republicanism. He does not seem inclined to firmly endorse either position. The poem clearly presents the danger of giving royalty absolute power, and emphasises the importance of fidelity to the will of the people and the laws, but it does not offer a clear political programme. Worden writes that 'Shakespeare's instincts are always descriptive, never prescriptive...The political views—the conflicting political views—of his characters...illustrate the interaction of belief and conduct, and show us how political doctrine is adhered to or abandoned or manipulated, but they do not tell us who is right' (p. 30). Worden may be right that Shakespeare does not 'tell us who is right' in *Lucrece*, but the poem clearly grapples with questions of the legitimacy of rulers and appropriate uses of power. Ultimately, Shakespeare abstains from endorsing a system of government but the poem still delivers a 'prescriptive' political message of the importance of stability and coherence, and the dangers of civil discord. Indeed, the fact that Shakespeare declines to present a firm opinion about political systems is interesting in itself. He distances his political discussion from a simple debate about which system is best. Indeed, what emerge more powerfully from the poem are a sense of uncertainty, and a warning of the perils of internal conflict division.

Rather than deciding between monarchy and republic in the poem, Shakespeare calls particular attention to the civil nature of the fall of monarchical Rome. Like the Trojans, bringing their doom inside their own walls, the defeat of the Roman monarchy after Lucrece's rape will occur from within and the monarchy will fall at the hands of other Romans. Shakespeare evokes the civil nature of this conflict through the theme of self-destruction. Several of the characters in the poem are self-destructive and hence exhibit civil conflict on an individual level. Shakespeare implies that this individual strife corresponds with political strife. Lucrece's suicide, for example—her decision that, 'Myself, thy friend, will kill myself, thy foe' (1196)—is the epitome of strife on the individual level, and leads directly to overthrow in Rome. Moreover, Lucrece's suicide is self-defeating because rather than avenging her rape, she completes Tarquin's violent act. As Coppelia Kahn writes, 'The 'Roman blade' that Tarquin flourishes over Lucrece is the same one that she turns against herself, and her death sanctions the continuation of the same force'.[18] Therefore, Lucrece's suicide, rather than purifying her 'body's stain' (1710), lets Tarquin 'guide [her] hand to give this wound' (1722) and by committing suicide Lucrece resumes and completes Tarquin's violation of her body. Moreover, throughout the poem she fears that her 'trespass' will be

'cited up in rhymes' (524), and paradoxically her heroic suicide, rather than quelling these 'rhymes', in fact inspires poets to tell her story. Her suicide thus embodies the theme of self-destruction in several ways and symbolically foreshadows the 'self-destructive' quality of the fall of monarchical Rome.

Collatine and Tarquin also exhibit personal civil strife. For example, Collatine's uninhibited praise of his excellent wife is exactly what inflames Tarquin's lust and therefore arguably contributes to her death. Tarquin's actions are also self-defeating. He is aware that his decision to rape Lucrece is self-destructive, and he observes that he 'buys a minute's mirth to wail a week' (213). Tarquin exemplifies microcosmic civil strife because his decision to rape Lucrece is the result of an internal struggle between his 'frozen conscious and hot-burning will' (247). Tarquin's better judgement loses in a civil war against his passions. The rape itself is also self-destructive in many ways. Firstly, the sexual act is inherently self-defeating, since the fulfilment of sexual desire removes the desire: Shakespeare notes that, 'lust, the thief, [is] far poorer than before' (693). Moreover, Tarquin is inflamed by Lucrece's 'name of chaste' (7) and her 'honour' equally with her 'beauty' (27). By raping her, he effectively destroys the chastity and honour which so enamoured him. Finally, Tarquin's action is self-defeating in the obvious way that it brings 'foul dishonour to [his] household's grave!' (198) and leads to the overthrow of his family's royal rule. Shakespeare thus emphasises the link between strife within individuals and political strife, enacting the political events underlying the poem in microcosm through its major characters.

Shakespeare also emphasises the civil destruction of Rome through his representation of contradictory Roman ideals. As Miola writes, *Lucrece* 'depicts a Roman struggling with Rome, the city that demands almost inhuman constancy and heroic self-sacrifice for the rewards of honor and fame' (p. 19). Indeed, Lucrece is not the only 'Roman struggling with Rome' in the poem. Lucrece, Collatine, and Tarquin are an exemplary Roman love triangle, since they all represent different sides of Roman morality, 'virtue', and ideals. For example, Shakespeare implies that masculine and feminine Roman virtues are inherently incompatible. The supreme feminine virtue, embodied by Lucrece, is chastity. The supreme masculine virtue, on the other hand, is *virtus*, which can be defined as 'manliness' and involves valour and military strength. Barton writes, 'Plutarch asserts in his *Life of Coriolanus*, "valliantenes was honoured in Rome above all other vertues: which they called *Virtus*, by the name of virtue self"' (p. 67). In a society in which masculine 'virtue' is equated with valour and conquest, 'virtuous' men will inevitably compete for the 'best' woman. If she is married, this will threaten her chastity. Consequently, masculine virtues are in competition with feminine virtues. Coppelia Kahn argues that Tarquin's rape embodies this conflict: 'even as Tarquin reverences the sacredness of the Roman community, the Vesta principle, he is driven to desecrate it in obedience to a principle equally strong and just as central: the principle of *virtus*, which depends on rivalry, agon, and conquest' (p. 33). Tarquin's masculine desire to 'conquer' the chaste Lucrece ruins her feminine virtue and illustrates the internal contradiction in Rome's masculine and feminine ideals. Heather Dubrow agrees that the rape illustrates Rome's ideological inconsistency, writing, 'Tarquin is a Roman who is, as it were, attacking the city of Rome...its walls [are] battered by competing citizens and competing values'.[19] Shakespeare therefore deepens the theme of self-destruction by illustrating the inconsistency of Roman ideals. As Thomas writes, 'Shakespeare is exploring the dangers of a system which lacks coherence' (p. 25). The internal instability of Rome's 'competing values' reflects the political event of Rome overthrowing itself from within.

Finally, the theme of civil conflict is also present in the language of the poem, which is packed with opposites, paradoxes, and contradictory, 'self-defeating' phrases. For example, Shakespeare refers to 'lightless fire' (4), 'poor-rich gain' (140), 'helpless help' (1056) and 'lifeless life' (1373), among many others (see Appendix A). The paradoxical, incongruous

quality of the language reinforces the political theme of civil strife. The poem's characters, plot, depiction of abstract ideals, and even its very language are all full of 'civil strife.' The 'social universe' that Shakespeare depicts in *Lucrece* is one in which individuals at all levels of society sabotage themselves, members of the same army betray one another, royals are treasonous against their own country, and collective values render one another impossible. Shakespeare paints a clear picture of the dangers of faction, discord, and civil war in a society. For the Elizabethans, relatively fresh out of a civil war and looking toward political unrest in the future, this illustration of the perils of civil conflict was very timely.

Shakespeare's decision to evoke the civil conflict in Rome underlying the poem by focusing on the civil conflict within individual characters is notable. At the time, many political thinkers weighed up the relative advantages of political systems such as monarchism and republicanism, believing that the characteristics of the system would determine the values and social dynamics of the society. It was fashionable to look to Rome for political inspiration, and to use classical examples to justify which system was the best for England. In a society where the 'chain of being' was believed to govern all aspects of life, the political system of the country was thought to guide and direct its individuals' behaviours and relations to one another. In the past, critics have applied this political outlook to Shakespeare, and have searched for his opinions about the best political system for a society. As Nelson writes,

> Scholars have...understandably expected to find within this oeuvre (the Roman plays) an intervention in the canonical early modern debate about the 'best state of a commonwealth'. After all, to write Roman history during this period (or to write dramas about it) was *itself* to take an opinion on this vexed question. Surely Shakespeare must have had a view about the best constitution (either the best absolutely, or the best for Rome); surely his Roman works must show us a Rome that is virtuous when governed correctly, and corrupt when governed incorrectly. (p. 256)

Yet, as we have seen *Rape of Lucrece*, Shakespeare does not offer a clear political programme. Nelson comes to this same conclusion about the Roman plays in general, writing that 'the striking fact about the Roman plays is that this is not so. The Shakespeare of the Roman plays emerges neither as a nostalgic partisan of the republic, not as a defender of the imperial *pax romana*. ...[H]e believes the choice does not matter' (p. 256).

In *Lucrece* Shakespeare seems to argue that any political system can only be as good, just, and effective as its component individuals. Rather than demonstrating a system in which the character of individuals flows from their political organisation, he demonstrates a society whose system takes on the character of its individuals. This shift may explain Shakespeare's apparent unwillingness to endorse a political system. In not clearly sanctioning a particular political system, his work suggests that the system is not the deciding factor of whether or not a society will be just. *Lucrece* demonstrates that all people, whether noble or not, suffer from inner contradictions and that a society with conflicting values will destroy itself from within. Shakespeare's focus on the personal and psychological emphasises that it is not the system which shapes human relations, but rather, the other way round. Nelson adds, 'Shakespeare's concern is with power and its consequences.... It organises the political sphere in every regime, which suggests that the whole question of the best regime is a red herring' (p. 269). Indeed, Shakespeare focuses more on Tarquin's abuse of power than on the system under which he operates, and seems more interested in how human nature shapes political systems than how it is shaped by them. Rather than endorsing a particular system, Shakespeare suggests that a society will never be just so long as it has confused or unreliable leaders and citizens, conflicting collective values, and competing factions. Of course, Lucrece's tragic death demonstrates the difficulty of solving these problems. The poem artfully presents a

complex view of early modern politics, and encouraged its politically anxious Elizabethan audience to make an attempt at working together.

Endnotes:

[1] Katherine Eisaman Maus, 'Introduction to *The Rape of Lucrece*', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc, 2008), p. 664

[2] David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought,* ed by. David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. i.

[3] Robert S.Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 20

[4] Barbara L. Parker, *Plato's* Republic *and Shakespeare's Rome: A Political Study of the Roman Works.* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), p. 33.

[5] Quentin Skinner, 'Shakespeare and Humanist Culture', in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought,* ed by. David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 273.

[6] Vivian Thomas, *Shakespeare's Roman Worlds* (Routledge: London, 1989), p. 1.

[7] Cathy Shrank, 'Counsel, succession and the politics of Shakespeare's *Sonnets*', in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought,* ed by. David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 108.

[8] Eric Nelson, 'Shakespeare and the best state of a commonwealth', in *Shakespeare and Early Modern Political Thought,* ed by. David Armitage, Conal Condren, and Andrew Fitzmaurice (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[9] E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1944), p. 10.

[10] E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Penguin, 1943), p. 17.

[11] Jonathan Dollimore, 'Introduction: Shakespeare, cultural materialism and the new historicism', in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in cultural materialism*, ed. by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985), p. 5.

[12] Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Renaissance Politics* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004), p 1.

[13] Anne Barton, 'Livy, Machiavelli, and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*', in *Shakespeare and Politics*, ed. by Catherine M.S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). p. 89.

[14] Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 142. The passage in question reads:

> Thou seem'st not what thou art, a god, a king,
> For kings like gods should govern everything.
> How will thy shame be seeded in thine age,
> When thus thy vices bud before thy spring?
> If in thy hope thou dar'st do such outrage,
> What dar'st thou not when once thou art a king?
> O, be remembered, no outrageous thing
> From vassal actors can be wiped away;
> Then kings' misdeeds cannot be hid in clay.
> This deed will make thee only loved for fear,
> But happy monarchs still are feared for love.

[15] John Joughin, 'Shakespeare and politics: an introduction', in *Shakespeare and Politics*, ed. by Catherine M.S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 1.

[16] Pierre Sahel, 'Some versions of coup d'etat, rebellion, and revolution', in *Shakespeare and Politics*, ed. by Catherine M.S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 140.

[17] Blair Worden, 'Shakespeare and politics', in *Shakespeare and Politics*, ed. by Catherine M.S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 28.

[18] Coppelia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, & Women* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 43.

[19] Heather Dubrow, *Captive Victors: Shakespeare's Narrative Poems and Sonnets* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), p. 95.

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Appendix A (Emphasis mine.)

'And to Collatium bears the **lightless fire**' (line 4)

'**Haply** that name of chaste **unhapp'ly** set' (8)

'O rash false **heat**, wrapped in repentant **cold**' (48)

'That they prove bankrupt in this **poor-rich gain**' (140)

'Make something **nothing by augmenting it**' (154)

'When he himself himself confounds' (160)

''Tween **frozen** conscience and **hot-burning** will' (247)

'That what is **vile** shows like a **virtuous** deed' (252)

'And he hath **won** what he would **lose** again' (688)

'This **hot** desire converts to **cold** disdain' (691)

'**Devours** his will that lived by foul **devouring**' (700)

'Having no other **pleasure** of his gain/But torment that it cannot cure his **pain**' (860-1)

'To make the child a man, the man a child,/To slay the tiger that doth live by slaughter,/To tame the unicorn and the lion wild' (954-6)

'Devise **extremes beyond extremity**' (969)

'Himself himself seek every hour to kill' (998)

'Some **happy** mean to end a **hapless** life' (1045)

'A bade of **fame** to **slander's** livery' (1054)

'A **dying** life to **living** infamy' (1055)

'Poor **helpless help**' (1056)

'**Sad** souls are slain in **merry** company' (1110)

'T'is **honour** to deprive **dishonoured** life' (1186)

'Myself, thy **friend**, will kill myself, thy **foe**' (1196)

'My life's **foul** deed my life's **fair** end shall free it' (1208)

'At last she thus begins: 'Thou **worthy** lord/Of that **unworthy** wife' (1303-4)

'My woes are **tedious,** though my words are **brief**' (1309)

'**Speed** more than **speed** but **dull** and **slow** she deems' (1336)

'So **woe hath wearied woe, moan tired moan**' (1363)

'In scorn of nature, art gave **lifeless life**' (1373)

'Many a **dry drop** seemed a **weeping tear**' (1375)

That through their **light** joy seemed to appear,/Like bright things stained, a kind of **heavy** fear' (1434-5)

'Why should the **private pleasure** of someone/Become the **public plague** of many moe?' (1478-9)

'With **outward** honesty, but yet defiled/With **inward** vice' 1545-6

'And in that **cold hot-burning fire** doth dwell' (1557)

'These contraries such unity do hold/Only to flatter fools and make them bold/So Priam's trust false Sinon's tears doth flatter/That he finds mean to burn his Troy with water' (1558-60)

'**Short** time seems **long**' (1573)

'May my **pure** mind with the **foul** act dispense' (1704)

'Which she **too early** and **too late** hath spilled' (1801)

'is woe the cure for woe?/Do wounds help wounds, or grief help grievous deeds?' (1821-2)