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THE FUNCTION OF IMAGERY IN THE RAPE OF LUCRECE

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A Research Paper  
Presented to  
The Graduate Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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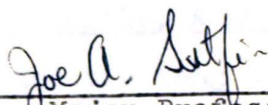
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
in Education

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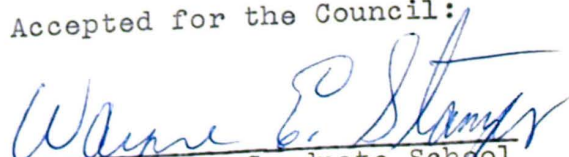
by  
Anne Nickell Reeves  
August 1968

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Anne Nickell Reeves entitled "The Function of Imagery in The Rape of Lucrece." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education, with a major in English.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Major Professor

Accepted for the Council:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dean of the Graduate School

## THE FUNCTION OF IMAGERY IN THE RAPE OF LUCRECE

The narrative poems of William Shakespeare have been lightly considered because of the bulk of plays that are his chief monument. However, one should not assume that, since Shakespeare was a great dramatist, he was not also a great poet. He did not leave a great bulk of poetry: a sonnet sequence, The Phoenix and the Turtle, A Lover's Complaint, The Passionate Pilgrim, and two long narrative poems which are believed to be his first attempts at publication. These two narrative poems appeared late in the sixteenth century: the first is Venus and Adonis which tells the story of Venus' attempted seduction of beautiful, but unresponsive, Adonis; the second is The Rape of Lucrece, which followed soon after. Both poems were dedicated to the Earl of Southampton, whose family motto, "One for all, and all for one we gage,"<sup>1</sup> is found in line 144 of The Rape of Lucrece.

In Lucrece Shakespeare uses historical fact which has been told before in story form.

The principal classic versions of the Lucrece story are in Livy's History and Ovid's Fasti. . . . Ovid

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<sup>1</sup>John Munro (ed.), The London Shakespeare (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1958), p. 1334. All citations refer to this source.

seems to be the main source, with some help, probably from the second book of the Aeneid.<sup>2</sup>

Shakespeare tells the story in different form using rhyme royal, a seven line stanza, rhyming ababbcc. The theme of his poem, as earlier in Venus and Adonis, is the destruction of something good by what is terribly evil.

Shakespeare's imagery has been analyzed, discussed, and documented by numerous critics, one of the first of whom was Caroline Spurgeon.<sup>3</sup>

The work of these critics has established beyond a reasonable doubt the principle that Shakespeare so subtly interlaced the images in a particular work that by reinforcing, supporting, and echoing one another, they help to build up, together with other aids, a logical and coherent form.<sup>4</sup>

It must be remembered that any study of just a part of a form can cause the critic to lose sight of the whole. However, it is by such piecemeal studies that the total picture becomes clear. In a study such as this, the critic realizes that

Shakespeare compresses into one short sentence an astonishing wealth of associations. . . . If we see or read a tragedy for the first time, we scarcely

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 1324.

<sup>3</sup>Caroline Spurgeon, Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936).

<sup>4</sup>Hereward T. Price, "Function of Imagery in Venus and Adonis," Papers of the Michigan Academy of Science, Art, and Letters, Vol. XXXI (1945), p. 275.

notice to what unbelievable degree imagery is employed. This is in part due to the fact that much of it belongs to the type of the merely suggested, implied and concealed imagery that has unobtrusively melted into the language. But it is also because the imagery is so wholly adapted to the situation and the emotion of the speaker, that we fail to see anything unusual in it.<sup>5</sup>

As one reads and studies Lucrece, he becomes aware that Shakespeare was familiar with a variety of things--so familiar that he drew images almost unconsciously from them. It is possible that, in growing up in the country, he had hunted the hare and had seen the falcon in the act of hunting. He knew the habits of the animals and drew on this knowledge.

Another possible reason for his use of nature imagery is that it was simply a literary convention, used by the writers of his day. Whatever the reason, he used natural imagery whenever he needed a vehicle to convey an idea. His images are all related by subject and all relate to the central theme. They are full of life in the country, and they show that the author knew, whether firsthand or vicariously, the open air and wild nature--the beast and man and plant; furthermore, they are used symbolically as well as literally.

Lucrece is the story of something good which is

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<sup>5</sup>W. H. Clemen, The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 103.



destroyed by something basically evil.

It deals with the basest lapses in the moral world, faithlessness, betrayal, violation of princely obligation, breakdown of noblesse oblige, abuse of power, and defilement of kinship in blood and fellowship in arms.<sup>6</sup>

That there is a connection between lust and cruelty cannot be doubted after one has studied Lucrece. Shakespeare also brings this out in Venus and Adonis, when Adonis tells Venus that satisfying the physical is not love, and without this love, the desire is only lust. In Sonnet CXVI, Shakespeare describes love as being something exquisite when he says:

. . . Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds  
Or bends with the remover to remove.  
Oh, no! it is an ever fixed mark, . . . (ll. 2-5)

In Romeo and Juliet he also describes lust as cruelty. As the reader looks at the different types of imagery, and particularly in the works of the same period, he knows that evil cruelly and blindly destroys what is good, not even knowing perhaps what it is that it destroys. Shakespeare foreshadows the fate of Lucrece by comparing her to the hare and the lamb, lust's victims who are cruelly pursued only to be enjoyed, with death as the result. These images are part of the plan in which the cruelty in nature

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<sup>6</sup>John Munro, op. cit., p. 1326.

symbolizes the destruction of something too beautiful to live--evil's triumph over good.

The first of the predominant images the reader sees in Lucrece is that of fire which is found in the first stanza where Tarquin's lust is called a

. . . lightlesse fire  
Which in pale embers hid, lurkes to aspire,  
And girdle with embracing flames, . . . (ll. 4-6)

Fire is again mentioned when Tarquin makes firm his decision and strikes fire from his flint to light the way to Lucrece's room (ll. 176-177). When the wind extinguishes the candle Tarquin has lighted,

. . . his hot heart, which fond desire  
doth scorch  
Puffs forth another wind that fires  
the torch. (ll. 314-15)

Later in the poem, when Lucrece stands before the painting of the "Battle of Troy," she sees the same fire in Paris.

Thy heat of lust, fond Paris, did incur  
This load of wrath that burning Troy doth bear.  
Thy eye kindled the fire that burneth here. . . .  
(ll. 1473-75)

The fire of lust caused the burning of Troy. Had Paris checked the desire which caused the war,

Troy had been bright with fame, and not  
with fire. (l. 1491)

The second image pattern is that of light and darkness, one of Shakespeare's favorites. He used it frequently in his plays, and in Romeo and Juliet in particular. "The







is beauty and untainted blood; at others, it is shame and lust. Color words used to describe Lucrece come in a great variety, with all connoting purity: white, silver, snow-white, rosy, pearly, ivory, azure, alabaster, and coral. According to Price, "Red and white give the two poles of Lucrece's being; she is the rose and the lily together. Each color strives with the other, and takes on its quality; the lily becomes red, and the rose white."<sup>8</sup> After Tarquin completes his foul deed, there are no colors left for Lucrece.

Poor Lucrece' cheeks unto her maid seem so  
As winter meads when sun doth melt their snow.  
(ll. 1217-18)

and her husband asks

What spite hath thy fair color spent?  
(l. 1600)

Losing that "clear unmatched red and white" emblemizes the tragedy of Lucrece.

Perhaps the chief image which Shakespeare uses in Lucrece is one that comes from nature. This (more than any other image except war) is used to describe the potential, destructive evil lurking in nature. In nature, however, the preying animal is doing only what comes naturally to

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 282.

satisfy the appetite; in Tarquin, the preying animal is out of control, and cannot be contained by any method. The preying animal is a blind destructive force, indicative of the devastating force of evil, caring not what it destroys; Tarquin has let man's baser instincts out of control and preys on Lucrece, who is the victim without recourse. He is "the owl and the wolf surprising the silly lamb" (l. 165); the "night wandering weasel" (l. 308); the "night owl catching the sleeping dove" (l. 360); the "grim lion who fawneth over his prey" (l. 1421); the "falcon couching the fowl below" (l. 507); the cockatrice with "white hind under his gripe's sharp claws" (l. 543); and the "foul, night walking cat dallying with a weak mouse" (l. 555).

All these symbols picture Tarquin as the hunting animal and Lucrece as the prey. The animals chosen as hunters are those which are the cruelest of the animal world; the hunted animals are perhaps the most defenceless. In viewing the contrast of the inhabitants of the animal world and those of the human world, the reader is made aware that the preying animals are as they are because it is instinctive--they hunt for food. Man, on the other hand, is vastly different; he is a creature of will--one who is capable of descension or ascension, depending on his actions. The contrast is also between physical strength and weakness, between cruelty and helplessness, between vice



and virtue, and above all, between lust and innocence.

"Tarquin's tigerish step leads him to the awful action, in spite of his self upbraidings, as if he, no less than Lucrece were powerless before the compulsion of his passion."<sup>9</sup>

The animal which hunts for food at least has a reason for hunting; Tarquin, in fact, has many reasons for not becoming the preying animal whose appetites are physical. Tarquin knows his appetites should be under strict control. Lucrece, hoping to change his evil intent,

Pleads, in a wilderness where there  
                                  are no laws  
To the rough beast that knows no  
                                  gentle right  
Nor naught obeys but his foul appetite.  
                                  (11. 544-46)

After Tarquin has satisfied his lust, he is compared to

. . . the full-fed hound or gorged hawk,  
Unapt for tender smell or speedy flight,  
Makes slow pursuit or altogether balk  
The prey wherein by nature they delight,  
So surfeit taking Tarquin fares this night;  
His taste delicious, in digestion souring,  
Devours his will, that lived by foul  
                                  devouring. (11. 694-700)

Shakespeare's preoccupation with this symbol of evil for about five hundred lines, or about one third of the poem, clearly indicates the extent to which the author stresses that evil blindly destroys the innocent.

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<sup>9</sup>Donald Stauffer, Shakespeare's World of Images (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1949), p. 34.



One important unifying device used in Lucrece is the imagery connected with heraldry, a formal codification of honor. This symbol runs like a thread all through the tapestry of this poem.

For princes are the glass, the school, the book,  
Where subjects' eyes do learn, do read, do look.

And wilt thou be the school where Lust shall learn?  
Must he in thee read lectures of such shame?  
Wilt thou be glass wherein it shall discern  
Authority for sin, warrant for blame  
To privilege dishonor in thy name? (ll. 615-621)

With this speech Lucrece expresses the thought that the king is to set the example for all who are of lower rank. Another reference to heraldry is found in the phrase

Under that color am I come to scale  
That never-conquered fort . . . (ll. 481-82)

The use of the word color is a play on words and can well signify that there is somewhere a changing of color. Tarquin has come in kinship, friendship, and kingship, but these are not his true colors--his true colors are deceit and lust. He comes in deceit, and he leaves, knowing that he has "besmirched his golden coat" (l. 205), and "wronged his honor, and wounded his princely name" (l. 599). Other references to heraldry are "[Collatine's] chivalry," "pawn-ing his [Tarquin's] honor," "knighthood. . . shining arms," "herald," "colour," "gaudy banner," "crest wounding," and "honour and dishonour" which are found many times and used many ways.

The whole idea of Tarquin's breach of honor of this period is crystallized in these lines:

The baser is he, coming from a king,  
 To shame his hope with deeds degenerate;  
 The mightier man, the mightier is the thing  
 That makes him honoured or begets him hate;  
 For greatest scandal waits on greatest state.  
 (ll. 1002-06)

The passage insists that the greater the position held by a person, the greater the honor or dishonor gained. Therefore, Tarquin, being king, has committed the greatest evil for which man might be held responsible--that is, he has broken the code of honor by which he lives, and life without honor is worthless.

Another iterative pattern of imagery is one that has caused Shakespeare to be classified as a metaphysical poet. His long involved image of war, and its attendant cruelty, barbarism and violence permeates the whole poem. This one is surely a unifying device since it covers the whole length of the poem. The military image is used in so many ways and so many times that it is easy for the reader to overlook its significance. From the beginning of the poem, the military metaphor is employed. Tarquin in Stanza 1 leaves

. . . the besieged Ardea all in post,  
 . . . to girdle with embracing flames the waist  
 . . . of Lucrece the chaste.

There are two types of forces in the poem--the active

which is Tarquin, the passive which is Lucrece. Tarquin says, "Affection is my captain" (l. 270), and "desire my pilot is, beauty my prize" (l. 280). He is the "rude ram to batter such an ivory wall!" (l. 469), and "under that colour am I come to scale/Thy never-conquered fort" (ll. 481-82).

The passive military image of Lucrece appeals to Tarquin's "rebel will" (l. 625). She is the "ivory wall" battered by the rude ram, and the "sweet city" that is entered. She says

Her house is sacked, her quiet interrupted,  
Her mansion battered by the enemy:  
Her sacred temple spotted, spoiled, corrupted  
Grossly engirt with daring infamy. (ll. 1170-74)

and

Her honor is ta'en prisoner by the foe. (l. 1608)

There are, in the situation of the story, many words and phrases that refer to military action: paying tribute, Roman lord marcheth, treason, traitors, watchword, trumpet, Roman blade, weak ruins, muster troops, insurrection, spoils, and subjection. There are many more, but this list suffices to show to what extent the military metaphor is used in Lucrece.

The whole metaphor of war is used in a different way after the crime has been committed. The next day Lucrece spends her time, after she has sent a message to



Collatine to come home, aimlessly walking from room to room and railing at Fortune which dealt so cruelly with her. As she walks, she comes upon a painting, depicting the fall of Troy, which was destroyed by violence and fire. The cause of the fall is, of course, the same evil which struck down Lucrece.

Critics have deplored the length [of this passage] but Shakespeare is using the picture to ram home his meaning. He is linking the spirit of war and violence that destroyed Troy with the evil power that destroyed Lucrece.<sup>10</sup>

Lucrece identifies figures in the painting with the characters in her story. This painting could be the end that Shakespeare intended when he started with the military image. The subject of the painting (sometimes called a tapestry) is the sacking of the city of Troy, and Lucrece identifies with Troy itself.

As Priam did him cherish  
So did I Tarquin; so did my Troy perish.  
(ll. 1346-47)

She sees, in the painting, a figure of grief with whom she feels identity--Hecuba, who is also "time's ruin, beauty's wrack" (l. 1451) and "life imprisoned in a body dead" (l. 1456). Sinon's figure is appropriate as a portrait of Tarquin's deception. The amazing realism of the painting touches much

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<sup>10</sup>Hereward T. Price, op. cit., p. 284.



in Lucrece, and she sees in it the same feelings that she has seen in herself and Tarquin. In the stanza which reads

For much imaginary work was there;  
 Conceit deceitful, so compact, so kind,  
 That for Achilles' image stood his spear  
 Grip'd in an armed hand, himself behind  
 Was left unseen, save to the eye of mind:  
 A hand, a foot, a face, a leg, a head,  
 Stood for the whole to be imagined.

(ll. 1422-28)

one realizes that much is indeed left to the imagination, and the realism of the picture points up something in both painting and poem. Lucrece, in her upset state of mind, reads much into the artist's interpretation of something that occurred a long time ago.

All these imaginings serve to fill the time and recount for Lucrece the past night as she waits for the arrival of Collatine from Ardea. Until his arrival, she and the reader can do nothing but wait and revel in the sorrow and shame which she has experienced. Using internal conversation, she discusses what has happened to her as she rails against Time, Opportunity, and Night in apostrophes that cover a great amount of time and a great number of lines in the poem. Such apostrophes are another element of metaphysical poetry. These soliloquies of lamentation cover about eight hundred lines, compared to Tarquin's inner debate, when he rationalizes the desires he has. Tarquin's debate takes only a few minutes in time and about

one hundred and twenty lines in space. This is too little time to rationalize such a cruel act of dishonor--one which will reach down through the ages and touch so many people.

Tarquin is destroying himself, no less than Lucrece. Even before he gives way to his baser instincts, he realizes that perhaps the final outcome will be his own destruction.

Such hazard now must doting Tarquin make  
Pawning his honor to obtain his lust. (ll. 154-55)

At another time,

Here pale with fear he doth premeditate  
The dangers of his loathsome enterprise  
And in his inward mind he doth debate  
What following sorrow may on this arise.  
(ll. 181-85)

And in the stanzas following, he debates still further on the shame and evil, and comes to this conclusion:

Then my digression is so vile, so base,  
That it will live engraven on my face.  
(ll. 202-03)

From tonight on, this then will be his knightly badge--evil engraven on his face, showing to the world just what sort of person he is.

Lucrece was assaulted, in the siege metaphor, by an external enemy, a foul usurper; the attack on Tarquin's soul comes from within. The attackers are his own passions. Earlier in the rape scene, these passions had been mutinous 'obdurate vassals'! . . . Now Tarquin faces the consequences--one mortal, the other immortal. . . . Tarquin condemns himself to disgrace throughout history. . . . The 'spotted princess' accepts her eternal damnation. . . . By accepting her stain as absolute and eternal, Lucrece becomes a symbol of the spiritual quality in Tarquin which his

deed violates. . .<sup>11</sup> The significant rape is the rape of Tarquin's soul.

These lines by Hynes lead to another actuality that was part of Shakespeare's world. In his world Shakespeare did not overlook the fact that the use of the natural image was important to the expression he wanted, and if the reader is to acquire the understanding he desires, he must interpret these images as Shakespeare intended. The age in which Shakespeare lived dictated in part his style. During the Elizabethan Age, certain ideas were considered important and true. Ulysses, in Troilus and Cressida, states certain basic principles of life in his famous speech on degree.

The heavens themselves, the plants and this centre  
Observe degree, priority and place,  
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,  
Office and custom, in all line of order, . . .  
Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And hark, what discord follows! (I, i, 85-88, 109-110)

Tillyard, in The Elizabethan World Picture, expresses the Elizabethan idea in which all people, animals, and plants are part of a chain of order with the king, God, and the sun as the primary links. The king, in Elizabethan history, was considered the next thing to God--the upholder and defender of the faith.

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<sup>11</sup>Sam Hynes, "The Rape of Tarquin," Shakespeare Quarterly, Vol. X (Summer, 1959), p. 451.



Even though the setting for Lucrece is the Roman nation, the idea of the chain of order still applies because Shakespeare wrote of his own world. Tarquin is ruler of the Roman nation, and for him to do what he did to Lucrece is certainly to create chaos in a world of order. As king, his duty is to protect Lucrece from any evil. This rule of chivalry carries over from the medieval world, and Bradbrook gives the cure for wanting to break that rule: "The ultimate remedy for his disorder is ethical: use of reason, prayer, and the exercise of will in self-control."<sup>12</sup>

Even the lowest link of the chain seems to resist the evil which Tarquin contemplates. The hinges on the door of Lucrece's bedroom resist opening; the threshold grates and each portal is "unwilling." Even the wind wars with his torch and blows the smoke in his face. He picks up Lucrece's glove, and the needle which is stuck in the glove attacks him, and pricks his finger. These are very low things in the chain of order, but they seem to try to turn aside the evil which is abroad.

Lucrece is part of the chain of order,

Not an island in itself; the stain which she suffered extends to others--to her husband, to her

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<sup>12</sup>M. C. Bradbrook, Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry (London: Chatto and Winders, 1965), p. 96.



family, and indirectly to the whole of her society. . . . To conceal or disregard the evil, even if it were possible, would be but to spread the compost on the weeds.<sup>13</sup>

Lucrece knows that her position is precarious. Shall she tell her husband what has transpired? Will he believe in her innocence? Will he trust her again? What position will she occupy if conception takes place? She cannot accept the answers to these questions because she believes that "Tarquin wronged me, I Collatine" (l. 819). She finally understands that her lamentations are futile, and a "helpless smoke of words." Her argument with herself ends in this decision:

My honour I'll bequeath unto the knife  
That wounds my body so dishonoured. (ll. 1184-85)

The virtue that is hers is placed in action. For Lucrece the situation is intolerable, but one in which she is imprisoned. In her code of honor there is no satisfactory solution in life--there is only death.

Lucrece knows, however, that she can find peace in death only when she is sure of retribution for Tarquin in life. The retribution which Tarquin faces is as serious and far-reaching as he imagines when he says:

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<sup>13</sup>Harold Walley, "The Rape of Lucrece and Shakespearean Tragedy," PMLA Vol. CXXVI (December 1961), p. 486.

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?  
 (ll. 211-15)

He pays by being banished from the Roman nation and by seeing his country turn from a monarchy to a consul type of government. The cost is far out of proportion to the gain.

Shakespeare, in writing this poem, delves deeply into the psychology of evil. He is interested, not nearly so much in the rape itself, as in the nature of the conflict. He is concerned with the causes, results, and primarily, the overall meaning of the action. What he is vitally interested in is the corruption, vicious and remorseless, of virtue by human evil.

Why would a man forego all the demands of chivalry, and violate the laws of God and man, for a moment's fleeting pleasure? Especially why would a prince and public figure repay hospitality, friendship and kinship with an evil act such as this? Shakespeare does not answer these questions, as indeed who can?

From first to last in Lucrece, Shakespeare has shown himself the master artist in using imagery. The images are apt and well done, fitting the story as he chose to tell it.

And from first to last the images hold together; they are coherent, and they are pregnant with the

same implications, as to the horror of evil, the uncertain footing of good.<sup>14</sup>

And these same images are so much an integral part of the poem that the reader accepts them and understands them as a vital and necessary ingredient to the final whole.

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<sup>14</sup>Hereward T. Price, op. cit., p. 285.



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