

Political Meanings in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*

Yuka KUMAKURA

Introduction

Shakespeare's second narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece* is based on the story described in Ovid's *Fasti* and Livy's *Ab urbe condita*. In 509 BC, Sextus Tarquinius, son of Tarquin, king of Rome, raped Lucrece, wife of Collatine, one of the king's aristocratic retainers. As a result, Lucrece committed suicide. Her body was paraded in the Roman Forum by the king's nephew. This incited a full-scale revolt against the Tarquins led by Lucius Junius Brutus, the banishment of the royal family, and the founding of the Roman republic.

Many Shakespeare critics tend to regard Lucrece's tragedy as a personal issue. Focusing on morality, Thomas Simone suggests that *The Rape of Lucrece* is a forerunner for Shakespeare later works.⁽¹⁾ Maurice Evans indicates that the narrative poem had as instructive and moral ideas as the medieval allegorical narratives.⁽²⁾ Some scholars, such as Ian Donaldson and Catherine Belsey, considered *The Rape of Lucrece* in terms of its aesthetic qualities, its rhetorical techniques, and its relationship with poetry and visual arts.⁽³⁾ Critics who have considered the *ekphrasis*⁽⁴⁾ of *The Rape of Lucrece* tend to explain its use in terms of the poem's thematic concern with questions of the relationship between art and life or illusion and reality, or they study connections between sight and voice.⁽⁵⁾ Since the involvement of Brutus and the banishment of Tarquin are detailed only very briefly at the end of the poem, most scholars have not put a special emphasis on the political background and issues. However, I think the poem can be seen in a different point when we consider the Argument that prefaced the text of *The Rape of Lucrece* in the first quarto edition. The term the Argument here means 'plot' or 'synopsis,' and this one presents a brief version of the narrative that is to follow in the poem. The Argument is close to the stories of Ovid and Livy, but it contains significant

differences from the poem itself. While the Argument explains the political background of Rome, such as the tyranny by Tarquin's father and the change of the political system by the banishment of Tarquins, the poem focuses on describing the monologues, minds and actions of Tarquin and Lucrece. Although the poem seems to mention little political events and background, Shakespeare clearly intends the Argument to be a part of the poem and this means that the political meanings are important to the poem.

In this essay, focusing on the role of Lucrece, I will consider the political meanings in *The Rape of Lucrece*. The first section will discuss the Lucrece's figurative images related to the notion of 'possession.' Lucrece is described as an object which is valuable enough to be stolen, and her image of possession leads to a female body-state metaphor in the poem. In the next section, I will consider the political intimation the poem suggests in terms of a territory-body analogy. To examine this issue, I will focus on Tarquin using the theory of the king's two bodies. Taking all political elements mentioned in these two sections into account, the final section will discuss the political meanings which Lucrece implies. I will focus on her change after the rape, and consider the interrelation between the political meanings in the poem and the social background in the Elizabethan era.

I

The Female Body and the State

In this section, I will focus on the relationship between the female body and the state, which is one of the political aspects Lucrece implies. In the correlation of the female body with the state, the image of 'possession' is significant. Shakespeare repeatedly describes Lucrece in relation to material objects, such as "the treasure", the "priceless wealth" (16-17), "that rich jewel" (34) and the "precious thing" (334).⁽⁶⁾ These images suggest that Lucrece is treated as property which belongs to her owner, namely her husband Collatine.

Moreover, as Shakespeare says that "Honour and beauty, in the owner's arm, / Are weakly fortified from a world of harms" (27-8), the images associated with material

possession also indicate that property is always subject to theft that its owner can change. One of the metaphors which imply such images is the word 'lock'. Later in the poem, the scene when Tarquin approaches Lucrece's chamber is described as "The locks between her chamber and his will, / Each one by him enforced, retires his ward" (302-3). Tarquin's forcing of the locks is an indication of his later physical act of rape.

Collatine also contributes to Lucrece's image of possession. When Collatine brags about his wife, Shakespeare says that Collatine "unlock'd the treasure of his happy state" (16). Here Collatine is in effect opening up Lucrece which "he should keep unknown / From thievish ears" (34-5) to other Roman noblemen. It is hardly surprising that when Collatine boasts of having something that kings do not have, Tarquin should respond by thinking that he, as the son of a king, should take what his inferior has:

Perchance that 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)

The important point here is that Tarquin does not try to make Lucrece his wife by killing Collatine. Tarquin's purpose is to destroy Lucrece's chastity for her husband, namely to deprive the sexual ownership of Collatine by raping Lucrece. After Collatine has unveiled his wife in this way, the narrator asks "why is Collatine the publisher / Of that rich jewel he should keep unknown / From thievish ears, because it is his own?" (33-5). Lucrece is a jewel that is Collatine's own, a possession, an object, not a person. Thus, the poem's opening sets up a situation in which all male perspectives deny the female subject any autonomy: they consider her a treasure, an object to be locked away.

In addition to the images of possession, metaphors for Lucrece's body such as house, fortress, mansion, temple and tree bark, emphasize the protective and enclosing function of the body which surround the soul and ward off danger. Territorial invasions invite literary analogues of bodily violation in Elizabethan literature, and in this narrative poem, rape is compared to all kinds of territorial invasion. In the rape scene, the analogy is explicit as Tarquin burgles his way to Lucrece's bedchamber, forcing the

locks of doors. Lock-forcing, an analogue of the rape, calls forth a metaphor of rape such as “Each lock by him enforc’d retires his ward” (302-03). When Tarquin approaches the sleeping Lucrece, his veins are described as “straggling slaves for pillage fighting” (428) and “obdurate vassals” (429) who do not care “children’s tears nor mother’s groans” (431) in “bloody death and ravishment delighting” (430). Since his hand “marched on” Lucrece’s “bare breast, the heart of all her land”, her “ranks of blue veins” leaves their “round turrets” (438-41). Tarquin’s hand is likened to the “rude ram” (464) which makes “the breach” (469) of Lucrece’s “ivory wall” (464) to enter the “sweet city” (469) which symbolizes Lucrece’s vagina.

The metaphors of territorial invasion of rape suggest a profound link between two prominent concerns: England fortified and siege warfare and the threatened female body. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, the images of Lucrece’s body likened to territory are not only on the personal level, but also on the social one. Shakespeare calls Lucrece’s breasts “ivory globes circled with blue, / A pair of maiden worlds unconquered,” and Lucrece’s smoothness is “like a goodly champaign plain” (407-08 and 1247). These images related to territory show that Lucrece’s body is described as a land. As Barkan indicates, while the body-state analogy was already commonplace in Plato’s time not only among political philosophers using anatomical descriptions but also among physicians describing anatomy in social or political terms, Renaissance England saw the prime of the anthropomorphic image of the state.⁽⁷⁾

Elizabethan England expressed fear of invasion through an insecure border: All over Catholic Europe, as well as in Ireland, Elizabeth was regarded as illegitimate, and unlikely to remain for long on the throne she had wrongfully ascended. Catholics were convinced that, when the time was ripe, Philip II of Spain, or some other powerful Catholic sovereign, would unseat her on the pope’s behalf. Especially, since Elizabeth saw a disobedient Ireland as a constant menace to her security, she could not allow Ireland to become a base for hostile fleets and armies. In fact, Irish lords kept up a continual correspondence with the queen’s enemies in France, Spain, and Scotland, and a Spanish army landed in Ireland in 1601. As Sir Philip Sidney warned in 1577 that the Irish ‘will turn to any invading force,’ England had the danger of constant border raids.

Because of the insecure island’s condition and the female sovereign, Renaissance

maps often identified England with the female body. The frontispiece figure Britannia who was described as a woman in Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, which was a topographical poem published in 1612, was clothed in a map (Figure 1.1).

In addition, Elizabeth in the Ditchley portrait stood on a map of England; jewels inlaid on her dress resemble in color and distribution the map's towns and forests, and the south coast below her feet disconcertingly resembles toes (Figure 1.2). In a portrait in Hardwick Hall, Elizabeth's petticoat is adorned with fish and sea horses like the sea creatures surrounding England in Saxton's country map. Elizabeth appears as defender against papist invasion in a Dutch engraving, superimposing her body on a map of Europe.



Figure 1.1 Title page of *Poly-Olbion* (1612).



Figure 1.2 *The Ditchley Portrait*, by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (1592).

The significant point here is that protection of England from invaders is represented as the defense of the female's chastity and virginity. Several medals and portraits made after the defeat of the Armada in 1588 show Elizabeth drowning with the Armada. The demure iconography of Elizabeth's virgin-knot, as Louis Montrose suggests, implies a relationship between her sanctified chastity and the providential destruction of the Spanish Catholic invaders. It means not only that Elizabeth's virginity represents England itself and the inviolability of England is due to her divine chastity.⁽⁸⁾

The land trope for the female body is not unique to Shakespeare's *The Rape of*

Lucrece and to the Elizabethan age. Metaphors comparing siege warfare with the siege of a lady's heart permeate medieval literature in many countries, and besieged cities are compared with sexually attacked women in many cultures besides England and in many ages besides the Renaissance. For instance, in the fifteenth century when European explorations led to the first sightings of the America, the idea of discovery and conquest of the new world was linked with the domination of female body by rape. The drawing by Jan van der Straet represents Amerigo Vespucci discovering 'America' which is described as a naked woman. In John Donne's *Elegy 19 "To His Mistress Going to Bed"*, we can also find land-as-woman metaphors, such as "O my America! my new-found-land, / My kingdom, safeliest when with one man manned, / My mine of precious stones, my Empery, / How blest am I in this discovering thee!"⁽⁹⁾ These two examples indicate that the body-state analogy lasted for more than two hundred years in European countries, including England.

Thus, *Lucrece* implies the female-state analogy which has spread over European countries including England over time. The relationship between a rapist and a woman who are raped is linked to that between a colonist and a land which is occupied. The reason why the rapist and the colonist have desires to conquer is the fascination of the woman and the land. This idea related to colonialism allows Tarquin to describe *Lucrece's* breasts as "A pair of maiden worlds unconquered" (407). As we can see the female body-state metaphor in other literary works after the Elizabethan era, *The Rape of Lucrece* plays a part in inheriting this body-state idea from the earlier generation and passing it to the later one in European countries. Moreover, the female body-state idea also influences on the political and cultural background of the Elizabethan era. One of the instances for this is the maps which identify England with a female body. England described as Elizabeth I suggests that England's condition which is surrounded and threatened by Catholic countries and its inviolability implied by Elizabeth's chastity and virginity. This historical background in the Elizabeth age interrelates with Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* in which a female body is related to a state with the images of possession. This is one of the political significance which *Lucrece* suggests in the poem.

II Tarquin and the King's Two Bodies

In the analogy between the female body and the state, Tarquin has an important role because he regards Lucrece as a material object. He is an invader who conquers Lucrece's body and deprives of her chastity which is for her husband. Moreover, since Tarquin's rape against Lucrece finally leads to the political change in Rome, his actions can be regarded as not only the private issue but also the public one. This chapter will focus on Tarquin and consider the political aspects Tarquin contributes to the narrative poem. I will show the parallel relationship between Tarquin's sexual assault and his father's tyranny, and then discuss Tarquin's internal conflict using the theory of the king's two bodies.

One political element of the poem related to Tarquin is the correspondence of his private act and his father's public act. There is foreshadowing for this suggestion. In the Argument, the narrator shows the fact that Tarquin's father was a usurper who had illegally "possessed himself of the kingdom" by killing his father-in-law, "not requiring or staying for the people's suffrages" and ignoring "the Roman laws and customs" (Arg. 3-5). At the end of the Argument, Brutus explained to the people the circumstances of Lucrece's death 'with a bitter invective against the tyranny of the King.' (Arg. 45-6) It means that he connected the private actions of the son to the public actions of the father as if both existed on the same plane.

In the poem, Brutus also says that "To rouse our Roman gods with invocations, / That they will suffer these abominations, / Since Rome herself in them doth stand disgraced" (1831-33). We can see from here that Brutus regards Lucrece's body as Rome itself, and Tarquin's sexual violation as his father's tyranny. The desire provoked in Tarquin, about to possess himself of Collatine's 'kingdom,' is described thus: "These worlds in Tarquin new ambition bred, / Who like a foul usurper went about / From this fair throne to heave the owner out" (411-13). The metaphor here links Tarquin with his father as usurper and tyrant. He is a man who uses his power to serve only his own will.

Besides Tarquin's actions, Shakespeare describes his internal conflict in detail. The focus of the first 750 lines of *The Rape of Lucrece* is on Tarquin. The poem begins in a

brilliant burst of energy:

From the besieged Ardea all in post,
Borne by the trustless wings of false desire,
Lust-breathed Tarquin leaves the Roman host
And to Collatium bears the lightless fire
Which, in pale embers hid, lurks to aspire
And girdle with embracing flames the waist
Of Collatine's fair love, Lucrece the chaste. (1-7)

The significant point here is the meaning of 'false desire.' Tarquin's desire is surely real enough, since it drives him to his terrible action. In fact, although Tarquin goes back to the camp with other noblemen after checking whether Collatine's boasting about his wife is true or not, soon Tarquin rushes to Lucrece secretly motivated by his desire. The intensity of his lust is expressed as "the trustless wings" (2) and "lust-breathed" (3).

The strain between the apparent speed and energy of Tarquin's lust-driven departure and the language used to describe his lust, which is peculiarly muted: "lightless fire", "pale embers" and "lurks to aspire" (4-5) implies a duality which simultaneously drives him forward and pulls him back in his mind. Later we see that this duality is described in more obvious ways, as an inner debate between will and conscience or between lust and honor, although he will be permanently damaged by the victory of his desire, and that there is never much doubt that conscience and honor will be the losers. As he plans his campaign against Lucrece, his inner division is made clear:

Such hazard now must doting Tarquin make,
Pawning his honour to obtain his lust,
And for himself himself himself he must forsake.
Then where is truth if there be no self-trust?
When shall he think to find a stranger just
When he himself himself confounds, betrays
To sland'rous tongues and wretched hateful days? (155-61)

This conflict between sexual will and conscience in Tarquin has significant meaning in terms of politics. Let me consider his will-desire struggle using the theory of the king's two bodies. Although Tarquin is not a king of Rome, this medieval political idea of kings is still beneficial because of two reasons: one that I mentioned earlier in Tarquin's action links with his father's sovereignty; the other is that his sexual violence against Lucrece finally leads to political change in Rome.

The theory of the king's two bodies was developed by the crown lawyers in the Elizabethan era.⁽¹⁰⁾ According to this notion, a king possesses two kinds of bodies: the body natural and the body politic. His body natural is subject to the same infirmities and defects which come from nature and age as other people. On the other hand, his body politic, consisting of politics and government, is established for the direction of the people and is not affected by natural defects and imbecilities.⁽¹¹⁾ In Plowden's reports about the issue of underage Edward VI's leasing lands, the contemporary lawyers mentioned as follows:

although he [the king] has, or takes, the land in his natural Body, yet to this natural Body is conjoined his Body politic, which contains his royal Estate and Dignity; and the Body politic includes the Body natural, but the Body natural is the lesser, and with this the Body politic is consolidated....and these two Bodies are incorporated in one Person.⁽¹²⁾

Here the body politic is not coordinate with the body natural, even though they form one unit. The body politic is not only more comprehensive and larger than the body natural, but is so superior that it has certain mysterious forces which can reduce and even remove the imperfection of the body natural.⁽¹³⁾

Moreover, although these two bodies in a king form one firm body, both bodies possess their own different capabilities:

The King has two Capacities, for he has two Bodies, the one whereof is a Body natural, consisting of natural Members as every other Man has....the

other is a Body politic, and the Members thereof are his Subjects, and he and his Subjects together compose the Corporation....and he is incorporated with them....and he is the Head, and they are the Members, and he has the sole Government of them.⁽¹⁴⁾

In the body politic constructed cooperatively between the king and his subjects, both sides' contribution to the proper function of the body politic is important to maintain a state. In other words, as the head of the body natural controls the other parts and manage the whole body, the king, as the head of his body politic, has to make decisions for the good of the entire body and the maintenance of the peace in a state.

Taking the theory of the king's two bodies, the female-state metaphor and the link between Tarquin's action and his father's conduct into consideration, we can see the analogy between the inner discord in Tarquin and the confusion in Rome. In the case of Tarquin, his body natural overcomes his body politic. In spite of repeated struggles, his virtue, majesty and conscience as "a sovereign king" (652) yield to his "black lust", "dishonor", "shame" and "misgoverning" (654). Tarquin uses love to justify his false desire as he thinks that "I'll beg her love but she is not her own. / The worst is but denial and reproving; / My will is strong past reason's weak removing" (241-3). He goes on to turn over in his mind all the wrong that he is doing, but always returns to the same point. Consequently, when in her chamber Lucrece attempts to persuade him to command his "rebel will" (625), he has already rehearsed all of her arguments and can brutally silence them: "Yield to my love. If not, enforced hate / Instead of love's coy tough, shall rudely tear thee" (668-9). Finally, as he rapes Lucrece, his evil, wicked nature in his body natural occupies the ruler's position, and this accordingly implies a convulsion in the state.

As I discussed above, Tarquin's internal disorder reflects the disturbance in the state as well as his action links with the king's government. Analyzing Tarquin's rape against Lucrece using the idea of the king's two bodies, we can see that the poem suggests the political situation in Rome which the Argument mentions. The result of Tarquin's internal disintegration is represented as his rape, and this consequence can imply the Tarquins banishment. Furthermore, the Argument refers to Tarquin's father

as he “contrary to the Roman laws and / customs, not requiring or staying for the people’s / suffrages, had possessed himself of the kingdom” (Arg. 4-5). Tarquin’s father behavior is parallel with Tarquin’s one: ignoring Lucrece’s entreaty and expostulation, Tarquin deprives her chastity. In view of this analogical relationship between Tarquin and his father, it can be said that Lucrece is regarded as Rome. The fact that Tarquin is driven to his sexual desire without reason and conscience provides the political significance to the poem in terms of the female body-state idea as well as the social background of Rome.

III

Lucrece’s Change and the Female Ruler in a Patriarchal Background

In the second section, I discussed Tarquin’s inner discord. Using the theory of the king’s two bodies, I showed that Tarquin’s personal action is related to his father’s public one. As his father dominates Rome through misconduct and violence, Tarquin’s will and lust overcomes his reason and conscience, and finally he assaults Lucrece. After the rape, he runs away from Lucrece’s place without a word. Contrastively, after the rape, Lucrece appears to assume discretion and autonomy. In the exchange with Tarquin just before the rape, she reasons about what the king’s son should be and tries to persuade him out of doing wrong. After the rape, Lucrece grieves over what has happened to her with a long monologue. Although there is a criticism which Lucrece’s speech is lengthy and tedious, I conceive that her change after the rape is important in the poem. In this section, considering the social background of the Elizabethan era, I will focus on Lucrece’s change after the rape, and discuss the political meanings Lucrece suggests in the poem,

On the eve of the rape, we can see the indication that Lucrece acquires autonomous and reasonable aspects. Lucrece implores Tarquin not to rape her and persuades him with a long explanation. She even tries to admonish about his behavior as a king’s son, as she says that “Thou seem’st not what thou art, a god, a king; / For kings like gods should govern everything” (601-2).

In the first part of the poem, Lucrece is described as a chaste, obedient, and silent wife who is a favorable and ideal wife to men. Even after Lucrece has decided to commit suicide and that she and her maid weep together, the narrator attempts to explain the outflow of emotion in terms of the difference between men and women:

For men have marble, women waxen minds,
And therefore are they formed as marble will.
The weak oppressed, th'impression of strange kinds
Is formed in them by force, by fraud, or skill.
Then call them not the authors of their ill,
No more than wax shall be accounted evil
Wherein is stamped the semblance of a devil. (1240-46)

This presents a clear hierarchy between masculine hardness and power and feminine weakness and pliability. It also suggests a kind of absence of subjectivity in women, who are only what men make of them and cannot be blamed for any evil that is stamped on to them. Because of the suggestion and images of the feminine passivity, tolerance is given to Lucrece who has sought her own culpability in what has happened to her.

The narrator also indicates female ignorance and absence of insight. As we have seen, the events occurred in *The Rape of Lucrece* are brought about by Collatine's act of publication and Tarquin's reading of her as both men render her into an object. Tarquin's reading imposes meanings upon her and is thus a form of control. Lucrece, conversely, cannot read him. Her inability to see any guile in Tarquin might seem to be pathetic naivete, but her failure to penetrate his appearance is presented figuratively as an inability to read:

But she, that never coped with stranger eyes
Could pick no meaning from their parling looks,
Nor read the subtle shining secrecies
Writ in the glassy margins of such books. (99-102)

Although she failed to perceive Tarquin's evil, Lucrece's cruel plight has changed her. The world that she had thought empty of guile has now become a place of misleading appearance. As Lucrece seeks meaning for her experience in the painting of the fall of Troy, she is led to the figure of the betrayer Sinon. He seems so mild and lacking in deceit that she at first thinks that the painter must have made a mistake: "So fair a form lodged not a mind so ill" (1530). This thought, however, brings Tarquin's shape to her mind, and the rage with which she tears the image of Sinon shows that she gradually begins to get insight.

Besides Lucrece's acquirement of insight, the rape changes her in other ways. There has been a degree of critical hostility to Lucrece because she talks too much, but in the first part of the poem we do not hear her speak at all. While she listens joyfully to Tarquin's praise of her husband, she responds with "wordless" gestures of prayer (112). When Tarquin appears in her chamber, she does speak as the narrator describes her as "vehement prayers" (475), but she does not give her lines. Her ordeal, however, gives her a voice, and after Tarquin has left she certainly uses it. The bulk of the remainder of the poem is her lament, and this suggests that Lucrece appears to assume autonomy. She learns to refuse the silence that was part of the concept of duty insistently imposed upon the Elizabethan wife. Her vocal suffering is carefully placed in a history of suffering women who were made to be silent. The song of the nightingale makes her think of the story of Philomel, whose sister's husband Tereus raped her and tore out her tongue to prevent her from accusing him. When she looks at the painting she finds the figure of Hecuba silently weeping over the body of Priam and thinks that the painter "did her wrong / To give her so much grief, and not a tongue" (1462-3). Lucrece resolves to make up the deficiency with her own "lamenting tongue" (1465). Although her lengthy, rhetorical speeches may be undramatic and tiresome, as some scholars think,⁽¹⁵⁾ her speeches imply her significant changes after the rape.

Some elements of the social background of the Elizabethan era might affect Lucrece's change in the poem. Before Elizabeth I acceded to the throne, in the last year of Mary's reign, the Scottish Calvinist preacher John Knox wrote in his *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* that "God hath revealed to some

in this our age that it is more than a monster in nature that a woman should reign and bear empire above man.”⁽¹⁶⁾ With the accession of the Protestant Elizabeth, Knox’s book was banned, but there remained a widespread conviction, reinforced by both custom and teaching, that, while men were naturally endowed with authority, women were temperamentally, intellectually, and morally unfit to govern. Men saw themselves as rational beings and they saw women as creatures likely to be dominated by impulse and passion. Gentlemen were trained in eloquence and the arts of war but gentlewomen were urged to keep silent and attend to their needlework. In men of the upper classes a will to dominate was admired or at least assumed; in women it was viewed as dangerous or grotesque.

Elizabeth made it clear that she intended to govern in more than name only and that she would not subordinate her judgment to that of any one individual and faction. Since her sister’s reign did not provide a satisfactory model for female authority, Elizabeth had to improvise a new model, one that would overcome the considerable cultural disadvantage of her sex.

Moreover, quite apart from this female liability, and besides the threat of powerful Catholic states, any English ruler’s power to compel obedience had its limits. The monarch was at the pinnacle of the state, but that state was relatively impoverished and weak, without a standing army, an efficient police force, or a highly developed, effective bureaucracy. To obtain sufficient revenue to govern, the crown had to request subsidies and taxes from a potentially fractious and recalcitrant Parliament. Under these difficult circumstances, Elizabeth developed a strategy of rule to govern the state, and with accomplishment such as the victory over the Armada in 1588, she contributed to achieve the status of a female authority.

Obviously, since Lucrece is not related to the throne, it is unreasonable to compare her with Elizabeth on the same level, and that is not my intention. What I suggest here is the possibility that Lucrece’s change has relevance to the change of attitudes about men and women during the Elizabethan period. As Lucrece changes from a silent, obedient and innocent wife to an autonomous, independent and discreet woman, the belief of women as creatures likely to be dominated by impulse and passion, while patriarchy still dominated over the Elizabethan society, was changing internally. I

conceive that the presence of the female political authority has an influence on this change to some extent. While there were severe criticism and objections to the female sovereign, Elizabeth I did accomplishments as the governor and exerted herself to protect England from the threat of other Catholic countries. This has a sufficient impact for the change of the belief of women.

Lucrece suggests the change of the Elizabethan attitude of women by showing her autonomy. When Lucrece decides to commit suicide, she thinks carefully and plans to kill herself after telling the truth to her husband and making him swear to revenge her death. This means that Lucrece urges the nobles including her husband and Brutus to take revenge against Tarquin. No matter whether Lucrece intends to banish Tarquins from Rome or not, as a result, her autonomous action leads the political change from the monarchy to the republic. Although the political situations are different, in terms of the relation to the political matters and the change of the idea of gender, we can also see the possibility that Lucrece has an correlation with Elizabeth I essentially beneath the surface.

Focusing on the female autonomy, I have tried to show the possible interrelationship among Lucrece, the view of women and the successful government by the female ruler. Through the wretched experience of the rape, Lucrece becomes not to be an ideal woman in terms of the Elizabethan conventional idea. She asks Roman noblemen to revenge on Tarquin, and kill herself while her husband and other men try to prevent her from doing so. When taking the historical background of Elizabeth I into account, Lucrece's autonomy and independence can be linked to Elizabeth I's ones in essence. In the society where the patriarchal beliefs were deeply rooted in the Elizabethan era, the presence of Elizabeth I could have an impact on both the people's ways of thinking and the literary works. From this point of view, I conceive that Lucrece's change can suggest the potential for the change of the people's ideas of women.

Conclusion

In the thesis, I have tried to emphasize the political significance in *The Rape of*

Lucrece and resolve the political meanings the poem, especially *Lucrece* suggests. One is that *Lucrece*'s change, from a silent, obedient and innocent woman representing the ideal Elizabethan wife to an autonomous, independent, and reasonable woman, reflects the internal change of the potential thought about women during the Elizabethan period. The other one is that *Lucrece*'s autonomous figure implies the potentiality of a female quality and authority as a sovereign.

While it is important to consider rhetorical, abstract and aesthetic matters for analyzing the texts of poetry and other literary works, I believe the different points of view and consideration with historical and social backgrounds are also important for understanding literary works. When we research the works with various points of view, the parts which seem to be failure, such as *Lucrece*'s lengthy speech, can have significant meanings in the texts. In this essay, I have tried to show the significance of political meanings in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*, and how the poem is related to the historical and social backgrounds during the Elizabethan period. One political meaning which the poem can suggest is the female body-state analogy. This idea is relatively universal since it spread around the European countries over time. At the same time, *The Rape of Lucrece* can imply the interrelationship with the Elizabethan historical background in terms of the change of ideas of women. Although those political meanings I mentioned are just the possibilities, they suggest that the existence of the political significance in this poem is important to some extent.

The story of Lucretia, on which *The Rape of Lucrece* is based, is widely known around the Europe from ancient to modern times. The story has been described not only in the paintings, the poetry and other works of art, but in some books about the political ideas such as *Discourses on Livy* by Niccolò Machiavelli (1517). Moreover, during the seventeenth century, the story of Lucretia had a political significance in England where since the Glorious Revolution occurred, the monarchy collapsed and the republic established. Taking this context into consideration, it can be said that Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* has the political significance, and it is essential for understanding the poem and the historical and social background. I believe that the possible political meanings which I discussed in the essay could contribute to the show of the political significance in the poem.

Notes:

- (1) Thomas Simone, *Shakespeare and Lucrece: A Study of the Poem and its Relation to the Plays* (Salzburg: Institut für englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1974).
- (2) Maurice Evans, *The Narrative Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1989), pp. 32-44.
- (3) Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), p. 55; Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare in Theory and Practice* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008), p.54-72.
- (4) The literary form of visual descriptions which allows one story to cite another, linking two narratives chronologically or thematically.
- (5) See J. Dundas, "Mocking the Mind: The Role of Art in Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece*," *Sixteenth Century Journal*. 14, 1 (1983), 134-22; E. Freund, "'see a voice': The Desire for Representation and the Rape of Voice," in Avraham Oz, ed., *Strands Afar Remote: Israeli Perspectives on Shakespeare* (London: Associated UP, 1998), pp. 62-86.
- (6) All quotations from William Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece are taken from John Roe, ed., The poems: Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece, The Phoenix and the turtle, The Passionate pilgrim, A Lover's complaint* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992).
- (7) Leonard Bar kan, *Nature's Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 69, 75.
- (8) Louis Adrian Montrose, "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text," in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 315.
- (9) John Donne, "To His Mistress Going to Bed," 27-30 in Robin Robbins, ed., *The poems of John Donne* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2008), pp. 325-30.
- (10) Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton UP, 1957), p. vii.
- (11) Edmund Plowden, *Commentaries or Reports* (London: S. Brooke, 1816), p. 212a.
- (12) Plowden, p. 213.
- (13) Kantorowicz, p. 9.
- (14) Plowden, p. 233a.
- (15) See F.T. Prince, ed., *The Poems. The Arden Shakespeare* (Methuen: Harvard UP, 1960), p. xxxvi; John Dover Wilson and J. C. Maxwell, ed., *The Poems. The Cambridge Dover Wilson Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), p. xxii.
- (16) Lacey Baldwin Smith, ed., *Elizabeth I* (Saint Louis: Forum, 1980).

Works Cited

- Barkan, Leonard. *Nature's Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1975. Print.
- Belsey, Catherine. *Shakespeare in Theory and Practice*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2008. Print.
- Christian, Margaret. "Elizabeth's Preachers and the Government of Women: Defining and Correcting a Queen." *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 24:3 (1993): 561-76. Print.
- Crosbie, J. Christopher. "Sexuality, Corruption, and the Body Politic: The Paradoxical Tribute of "The Misfortunes of Arthur" to Elizabeth I." *Arthuriana* 9:3 (1999): 68-80. Print.
- Diede, Martha Kalnin. *Shakespeare's Knowledgeable Body*. New York: P. Lang, 2008. Print.
- Donaldson, Ian. *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and its Transformations*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1982. Print.
- Evans, Maurice. *The Narrative Poems*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1989. Print.
- Fry, Peter and Fiona Somerset. *A History of Ireland*. London: Routledge, 1988. Print.
- Heisch, Allison. "Queen Elizabeth I and the Persistence of Patriarchy." *Feminist Review* 4 (1980): 45-56. Print.
- Hyland, Peter. *An Introduction to Shakespeare's Poems*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. Print.
- Kantorowicz, Ernst H. *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1957. Print.
- Mattingly, Garrett. *The Armada*. Cambridge, Mass: Riverside, 1959. Print.
- Montrose, Louis Adrian. "The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text" in *Literary Theory / Renaissance Texts*, ed. Patricia Parker and David Quint. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986. Print.
- Plowden, Edmund. *Commentaries or Reports*. London: S. Brooke, 1816. Web. 25 Aug. 2012.
- Roe, John, ed. *The Poems: Venus and Adonis, The Rape of Lucrece, The Phoenix and the Turtle, The Passionate Pilgrim, A Lover's Complaint*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992. Print.
- Scalingi, Paula Louise. "The Scepter or the Distaff: The Question of Female Sovereignty, 1515-1607." *Historian* 41:1 (1978): 59-75. Print.
- Simone, Thomas. *Shakespeare and Lucrece: A Study of the Poem and its Relation to the Plays*. Salzburg: Institut für englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1974. Print.
- Smith, Lacey Baldwin, ed. *Elizabeth I*. Saint Louis: Forum, 1980. Print.
- Strong, Roy C. *Portraits of Queen Elizabeth*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1963. Print.
- Woodbridge, Linda. "Palisading the Elizabethan Body Politic." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 33:3 (1991): 327-54. Print.