

LAVINIA, THE UNACKNOWLEDGED CO-AUTHOR OF *TITUS ANDRONICUS*

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## Introduction

In the 1687 publication of his own version of *Titus Andronicus*, Edward Ravenscroft made the first documented assertion that Shakespeare's play was not wholly Shakespearean at all: "I have been told by some anciently conversant with the Stage, that it was not Originally his, but brought by a private Author to be Acted, and he only gave some Master-touches to one or two of the Principal Parts or Characters; this I am apt to believe, because 'tis the most incorrect and indigested piece in all his Works; It seems rather a heap of Rubbish then a Structure." Aligning himself with strategies that would purify polluted Shakespeare, Ravenscroft argues for getting back to the "ancient" truth of the play's origins and for discarding the "Rubbish" of a "private Author." Ravenscroft attempts to replace Shakespeare's original collaborator and in fact reorders and deletes a great deal in the scenes that modern participants in the collaboration debate attribute to George Peele, since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the primary candidate for co-authorship of *Titus*.<sup>1</sup> While Ravenscroft may seem to anticipate later attempts to discern the work of different writers within the play, I argue that his alterations target "one . . . of the Principal Parts or Characters." The subtitle of his adaptation is "The Rape of Lavinia," and his revisions strive to rewrite that rape as an utterly debilitating, silencing event.

Although Lavinia is already silenced in Shakespeare's play, raped and mutilated by Chiron and Demetrius, Ravenscroft feels the need to reduce her further. He eliminates the moments, before the loss of her tongue, when Lavinia is neither silent nor submissive, and particularly alters Act IV scene i, in which she reveals the circumstances of her rape. The copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which Shakespeare emphatically brings on stage,

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<sup>1</sup> The scenes most commonly attributed to Peele are I.i, II.i, possibly II.ii, and IV.i. Peele's co-authorship was first suggested by T.M. Parrot in 1919.

disappears, as does Lavinia's own word for her experience, "stuprum." Instead, Titus writes "rape" in the earth and Lavinia obediently copies out the names of her attackers. Ravenscroft is indeed attempting to replace a co-author, but one within the play itself. The anxieties that he both demonstrates and sets in motion about the potentially collaborative status of the play are indicative of Lavinia's disruption and even absorption of the many narratives functioning within it.

In *Titus Andronicus* Lavinia herself is initially circulated like a collaborative text, inscribed within different stories by both Titus and her male relatives and by Aaron and the Goths. Jeffrey Masten and Wendy Wall have noted that early modern texts were often gendered feminine by writers and publishers. Stephanie Jed associates manuscripts violated both by textual errors and attempts at correction with the rape of Lucrece, while Wall highlights the styling of printed texts as wantons exposed to voyeuristic readers.<sup>2</sup> Conceptions of feminized texts depend on the rhetoric of a breach of purity and on the involvement of many in the creative process. Thus it makes sense for a woman treated as a text to become a figure for a multiform collaborative process in a less-than-reputable field.

Whether or not *Titus Andronicus* is a co-authored play, collaboration was a constant part of Shakespeare's professional world, taking any number of forms from actually composing with another playwright to preparing for performance with other actors to revising an older work. Examinations of collaborative practice tend to raise questions about differing modern and early modern ideas of authorship and creative

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<sup>2</sup> See Jed, 27-45: "A text made chaste or castigated by a philologist is, by definition, a contaminated text, a text that has suffered the wounds of being handled or touched" (33); See particularly Wall's analysis of the stationer's address in *Gorboduc*, which explicitly links the text with the raped Lucrece, 172-83.

production and, in Shakespeare's case, the extent of his interest and investment in the emergence of single authorship.<sup>3</sup> However, there is no reason to assume that because co-authorship was familiar to Shakespeare it would not figure as a vexing issue ripe for examination through Lavinia. The impossibility of preserving or producing a definitive text by any early modern dramatist has been much remarked on.<sup>4</sup> What for us are the versions that have luckily survived were elements in an ongoing process of alteration, almost a literalization of what Bakhtin terms "openendedness." He asserts that this unfinished quality is the most important addition produced by the "novelization of other genres" (6): "an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality" (7). Lavinia is repeatedly designated by others as the site for conclusion, the ending that will provide a new beginning. However, she engages such narratives with the intent of writing herself out of any concluding gesture.

Before proceeding to Lavinia's co-authorial and revisionary moves, the narratives that form their preconditions must be delineated. Shakespeare places Lavinia in compromise/ing positions, caught between competing tales. First among these is Titus's Troy-inflected narrative of Lavinia's chaste body. Titus is heavily invested in Rome's genealogy, repeatedly referencing Virgil's *Aeneid* and thus the original Lavinia, mother of the Romans. He envisions his daughter not only as the perpetuator of Rome, but also as its embodiment, her chastity representing the unbroken descent from Troy, her mortal

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<sup>3</sup> On Shakespeare's relationship to both single and collaborative authorship see Helgerson and Knapp.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Stephen Orgel, "What is a Text?" 1-5 in *Authentic Shakespeare*.

body containing the pure, immortal body of the state.<sup>5</sup> The second narrative Titus invokes for his daughter is activated by her rape and is articulated by him as the story of Virginia and Apius. In differing versions, Virginia's father kills her either to prevent her rape or afterward because of it.<sup>6</sup> This story perpetuates the idea of Lavinia's body as representative of Rome. Now, however, she is interpreted as contaminated like her society, a necessary sacrifice for Rome's purification and her own. In Arthur Little's interpretation of the link between rape and sacrifice, rape becomes a necessary precondition to prepare the woman for the sacrifice her society requires. In *Titus* this narrative of sacrifice is particularly associated with the story of Lucrece, like Virgil's Lavinia one of the founding women of Rome and specifically of the Republic. The sacrifice story even offers, according to Little, the perpetuation of the idea of a female double body. Instead of a fallible mortal body inclosing a pure, infallible one, Lucrece is both penetrable and impenetrable particularly in the moment of her suicide.<sup>7</sup> However, problematically for Titus and the male Andronici, they are not the ones to set the Lucrece sacrifice narrative in motion.

Aaron the Moor, associated with the Goth faction while retaining his independence, is the first to relate Lavinia to Lucrece as he plans her rape. He forces the Andronici to switch narratives, plotting the sacrifice story and putting it in motion long

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<sup>5</sup> Leonard Tennenhouse distinguishes between the metaphoric body politic with the monarch as its head and the state incorporate or embodied in Queen Elizabeth. Titus see his virtuous daughter possessing, like Elizabeth, an infallible body contained within the mortal one, a view altered by her rape. See 27-32.

<sup>6</sup> The original story from Livy also found in Chaucer's *Physician's Tale* is that of preventative murder, although Robin Bott writes that both versions circulated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. See 189-90.

<sup>7</sup> For the connection between rape and sacrifice see Little, 3-4 and 48: "Rome demands Lavinia's rape as much as it demands her sacrifice; these are concomitant acts." For the double body of the female nude and of Lucrece, see 39-42.

before the tale occurs to them. Further, rather than employing a progression of stories about Lavinia as Titus does, shifting one of wholeness and purity to one of violation and sacrifice, Aaron explicitly initiates two tales almost simultaneously. Along with Lucrece, the other of the most identifiable stories present in Shakespeare's composite formation of Lavinia is Ovid's Philomela.<sup>8</sup> Aaron's selections are intended to inscribe Lavinia as a raped woman. However, they are also both stories of social change. Philomela and her sister Procne bring down Tereus and the house of Thrace, actually feeding him his own son in retribution for raping and mutilating Philomela.<sup>9</sup> Even the Lucrece story, for the Andronici a tale of reconstitution, is in fact a story of institutional change. Her rape and suicide serve as the justification for the overthrow of the tyrannical Tarquin family and the institution of the republic. Catherine Belsey identifies in Lucrece's suicide both a reassertion of self-determination and the ultimate act of regime change: "she reaffirms her own sovereignty in an action that is deliberately and independently chosen. The effect is a change of regime to one based on consent: *propriety* will no longer be synonymous with *property*" (333). That is possession, whether of a woman or of a kingdom, "was no longer acceptable as a model of human relations" (334) but was replaced by republican ideas of popular consent. The cross-connection of the Lucrece story, employed by both Aaron and Titus, is indicative of the futility of attempting to sustain an ideal of linguistic, narrative, or bodily purity in Shakespeare's Rome.

The conflicting tales that strive to inscribe Lavinia cannot be neatly divided into Goth and Roman, irreverent Ovid versus the more staid Virgil and Livy. Indeed, those I

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<sup>8</sup> Aaron is the first to mention both Lucrece and Philomela: "Lucrece was not more chaste / Than is this Lavinia" (II.i.108-109); "This is the day of doom for Bassianus; / His Philomel must lose her tongue today" (II.iii.42-43).

<sup>9</sup> For the story of Philomela, see *The Metamorphoses* Book VI 412-674.

have listed are hardly the only stories operating in the play or on Lavinia. Also present from *The Metamorphoses* are the raped Medusa, turned into a Gorgon and petrifying all who look on her and the grief-stricken, vengeful Hecuba, snarling and fruitlessly biting at stones instead of speaking.<sup>10</sup> Circulating alongside the argument for the necessity of sacrifice is the opposing Augustinian insistence that while the body of a raped woman may be violated, her mind remains pure, thus evoking no guilt and requiring no punishment.<sup>11</sup> Both Lucrece and Lavinia refuse such clear distinctions between mind and body, guilt and innocence.

Lavinia's refusal to follow one specific narrative also serves as a rejection of the pattern of reading and interpretation adhered to by others throughout the play: insistence on repetition. The revenge tragedy genre is itself dependent on repetitive, eye-for-an-eye acts of vengeance, yet in this case the instigating crime lies irretrievably beyond the boundaries of the play. Tamora's eldest son, Alarbus, whose death seems to initiate her attacks on the Andronici, is sacrificed to appease the ghosts of Titus's twenty-one dead sons, who died in a war whose origins are unknown and whose combatants seem able to change sides without difficulty. This violence spiraling from some distant origin recalls Heather Dubrow's assertion: "One of the deepest fantasies in Tudor and Stuart England, I suggest, is uncontrolled repetition emanating from a single case, a single error – a metaphoric rendition of contagion" (38). Dubrow associates early modern anxiety about the unending replication of one mistake with original sin. However, it seems equally

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<sup>10</sup> For Perseus telling the story of Medusa's rape see *The Metamorphoses* Book IV 790-803; for Hecuba's revenge against the Thracians for the death of her youngest son see Book XIII 533-75.

<sup>11</sup> For discussions of Augustinian criticism of Lucrece that see her as innocent with regard to the rape but guilty of her own murder, see Catherine Belsey, 315;331; Stephanie Jed 3-4;13.

applicable to the violent one-upmanship of *Titus*. Dubrow goes on to identify several strategies by which early modern writers respond to exponential replication anxiety. These include a culture's creation of myths about itself incorporating "potentially threatening repetition into overarching patterns of linearity and teleology," an example being the myth of Troynovant, and the attempt to "redefine repetition as control and order" (38), purposeful repetition intended to establish a familiar aesthetic pattern. Shakespeare displays these writing strategies in his characters' responses to encroaching uncertainty. Titus, Marcus and even Aaron struggle for something reminiscent of Ravenscroft's desire for "Structure."

Like Shakespeare's contemporaries, his Romans fend off uncertainty by associating themselves with the overarching events of well-known cultural myths like that of new Troy. Titus links his dead sons to Priam's, and a lord links Lucius's concluding story of loss with the tale Aeneas told to Dido. They find reassurance in a sense of the role they are to play, while Lavinia is a confusing composite. Also in evidence is the strategy of repeating in order to create a familiarizing pattern, if an associable cultural narrative is not readily available. Lavinia's rape, although not staged, is seen again and again, for example in Marcus's painful blason of her already partially dismembered body and in the way he demonstrates writing in the dust. The Lucrece narrative of sacrifice calls on the raped woman to repeat the initial, violating penetration with a second, purifying one. The Andronici try to make up for Lavinia's failure to repeat and their own failure to recognize it by enacting the repetition for her, most



prominently in Titus's murder of Lavinia.<sup>12</sup> These strategies for silencing or containing repetition fail even as attempts to neutralize Lavinia fail.

Rome was never a haven, protected from confusion by repetitive strategies and narratives of purity, but rather a place for commingling and hybridization. The partially patrilineal, partially electoral means of determining the emperor, the easy incorporation of Goths both at the beginning and end of the play, Tamora's bi-racial baby, all indicate the state's composite existence. When Lavinia is raped she comes not simply to resemble the state's hybridity, but to recognize it. Through her violation and mutilation she becomes aware of the stories operating on her, stories about both herself and Rome. Herself an amalgamation, Lavinia embodies and recognizes the impossibility of inserting herself, or anyone else, into one right ending. Acknowledging her own existence as a composite, Lavinia develops the ability to create additional composites, manipulating the stories and collaborating with the characters surrounding her. It is not that Lavinia admits hybridity into Rome, obscuring what were once clear-cut distinctions, but that her composite nature and collaborative skills make use of elements already available but previously ignored. The manipulation of these elements leads to Lavinia's creation of her own openended story.

### **Rome's rich ornament**

Before she even appears on stage Bassianus' declaration of love characterizes Lavinia not only as decorative but also as someone worth swearing by and, ultimately,

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<sup>12</sup> I disagree with Tennenhouse's suggestion that Shakespeare stages rape as amputation, rather than penetration (see 32-33). Rather, penetration and dismemberment are both evidenced throughout the play and are linked in Lavinia's rape as attempted means of violent inscription that ultimately facilitate the continuation, rather than the conclusion, of the collaborative process.

fighting for. This is certainly the attitude that Titus takes toward his daughter. Not only does he kill one of his remaining sons in an attempt to “rescue” her from Bassianus, he even establishes Lavinia as the justification for going to war in the first place: “Kind Rome, that hast thus lovingly restored / The cordial of mine age to glad my heart. / Lavinia, live; outlive thy father’s days, / And fame’s eternal date, for virtue’s praise” (I.i.169-171). While Titus seems to credit Rome with sustaining Lavinia, he also associates her with the eternal rightness of Rome. She may not be queen, but he identifies a virtuous, infallible and eternal body within her and links it to the state. He accepts with pride the deaths of his sons, likened to Priam’s, but finds fulfillment in the assurance of Lavinia’s life. Although he does treat her as property, someone who exists for his justification and happiness, someone whom he can marry off at will, his swift acceptance of Saturninus’ offer of matrimony may have just as much to do with Titus’s sense that Lavinia should be empress as with his own pride.

Lavinia’s understanding of her body is shaped by the dominant story told to her most prominently by Titus, but also by Bassianus and the other men in her world. Her first lines even reiterate the benediction Titus has already repeated over the bodies of his sons. To Titus’s “In peace and honor rest you here, my sons” (I.i.159) Lavinia begins “In peace and honor live Lord Titus long” (160). Their first, indeed only, words together have a formulaic, repetitive cast, each drawing on phrases used by the other. Lavinia concludes by asking her father’s blessing: “O bless me here with thy victorious hand, / Whose fortunes Rome’s best citizens applaud” (166-67). She is being properly submissive, yet Lavinia also expresses particular interest in being included in the work she sees Titus as having accomplished, unaware of the ways she herself will lead to the

severance of that hand. Katherine Rowe argues that in *Titus* hands are liminal, functioning as both parts of the body and as objects, a physical link between intentionality and instrumentality.<sup>13</sup> Receiving a blessing from Titus's hand, Lavinia initiates a process by which she enters a liminal state. On the way to choosing the retention of dismemberment, an unfinished story and body, she is caught between being treated as a text and acting as a collaborator. Rowe goes on to emphasize the dual definitions of the term "agency," which "as used in the early modern period, frequently includes both the faculties of action, activity, or operation and the corollary notion of instrumentality or intermediation" (282). In treating her as one aspect of the definition, an instrument to be used, altered, inscribed upon, both Romans and Goths provide Lavinia with the tools necessary to act, to collaborate and to shape others' interpretations of her.

Lavinia's exposure to multiple interpretations begins with the play's first rape. Bassianus' "surprise" initiates her movement toward a collaborative role ultimately enabled through the violent revision enacted by Chiron and Demetrius. Like her chastity and virtue, her prior betrothal to and supposed affection for Bassianus are stories told about her, never confirmed.<sup>14</sup> Bassianus and the other Andronici argue that the protection of Lavinia's virtue justifies their actions, the very virtue Titus has used to justify his wars, the death of his sons and Lavinia's rightful place as empress. Even Titus eventually accepts that Mutius's sacrifice was honorable enough to merit his burial in the Andronici tomb, while never betraying any doubt with regard to his own actions. Lavinia

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<sup>13</sup> See Rowe, 282.

<sup>14</sup> Among Ravenscroft's attempts to make Lavinia's position more palatable, he increases the discussion of her relationship with Bassianus, although never in her own words.

witnesses the malleability of the story of her virtue, as even after being ostensibly forgiven by Saturninus for an act over which she had no control he continues to treat her like a “changing piece” (I.i.312). Her virtue can be claimed as a cause by multiple sides at once and can be discounted regardless of her actions.

These events also introduce Lavinia to another variably defined term: rape. Rape could be used to label abduction, as Saturninus does, and in this sense it retains connotations of theft, of the woman in question as the property of her father or her betrothed. Emily Detmer-Goebel notes that in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the crime of rape was only just beginning to delineate a crime specifically committed against a woman.<sup>15</sup> As Lavinia is written into the latter definition by Aaron, with the help of Chiron and Demetrius, she becomes more aware of the liminality of her position, of the stories circulating around her and of her own circulation. Even in encountering the more modern definition of rape, Lavinia must cope with the dual connotations of the experience: “On the one hand, victims of rape are the helpless objects of outside violence; on the other, they actively resist the rapist, demonstrate by their behavior that the act is perpetrated against their will” (Belsey; 316). Lavinia’s growing recognition of these multiple tales is evidenced in her encounter with Tamora prior to her rape.

As Shakespeare later discloses, Lavinia is a well-educated woman. That education combines with the lessons of her earlier abduction when Bassianus unwisely

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<sup>15</sup> Detmer-Goebel sites 1558 4&5 Philip and Mary, cap 8, a statute that deals with heiress abduction without mention of rape and 1576 18 Elizabeth cap 7, which addresses rape without abduction. For further discussion of rape in early modern legal discourse, see also Carolyn Sale.

picks a fight with Tamora, and again chastity is at issue. In response to Bassianus' greeting, mocking Tamora over her affair with Aaron, the empress replies:

Had I the pow'r that some say Dian had,  
Thy temples should be planted presently  
With horns, as was Actaeon's, and the hounds  
Should drive upon thy new-transformed limbs,  
Unmannerly intruder as thou art! (II.iii.61-65)

As Tamora appropriates the goddess's power, she hints at Bassianus' impending murder but leaves room for Lavinia's retort. Lavinia demonstrates her familiarity with *The Metamorphoses*, neatly shifting the identity of the Actaeon figure and using Tamora's story against her:

Under your patience, gentle empress,  
'Tis thought you have a goodly gift in horning,  
And to be doubted that your Moor and you  
Are singled forth to try experiments.  
Jove shield your husband from his hounds today!  
'Tis pity they should take him for a stag. (66-71)

In Lavinia's words Tamora's power becomes not that of a goddess, but simply that of an unfaithful wife cuckolding her husband. This is hardly the prim, obedient Lavinia that Titus and others have led us to expect. She is not only witty, but also spiteful, sarcastically opening with the pretense of respect only to degrade Tamora. While Marcus later recalls "the heavenly harmony / Which that sweet tongue hath made" (II.iv.48-49), Shakespeare here presents a Lavinia who is far from sweet. Although Lavinia does not initiate the deriding of Tamora's infidelity, she participates with great relish, sure that hers is the body, and the story, that will prevail.

In contrast, Lavinia's seemingly disordered plea to Tamora for mercy reveals her increasing confusion. Indeed, Lavinia's behavior seems to confuse Tamora herself: "I know not what it means, away with her!" (II.iii.157). Not only does Lavinia continue to

insult Tamora and her sons, she anticipates her own rape even as she strives to avoid it. This is not simply terrified ineptitude stemming from fear of bodily harm and witnessing the murder of Bassianus. Rather, as Lavinia gains gradual awareness of the other narratives operating in this moment she begins to struggle with the repetitive strategies for coping with chaos demonstrated by her father. She especially focuses on the relationship between Tamora and her sons, testing out the possibility that the sons may not take after their mother, that events may not follow the most obvious pattern:

When did the tiger's young ones teach the dam?  
O, do not learn her wrath; she taught it thee;  
The milk thou suck'dst from her did turn to marble:  
Even at thy teat thou hadst thy tyranny.  
Yet every mother breeds not sons alike. (II.iii.142-46)

Lavinia comments on the seemingly inverted exchange between Demetrius and Tamora, in which Demetrius convinces the empress to listen to Lavinia's plea: "Listen, fair madam: let it be your glory / To see her tears; but be your heart to them / As unrelenting flint to drops of rain" (139-41). Although Lavinia herself asks him to do so, she finds something troubling but also promising in the performance. The possibility of a problematic mother-son relationship becomes something to be desired, and Lavinia must hope that both nature and nurture have failed to mold a child in the form of the parent.

In describing Tamora's marble lactation, Lavinia recurs to Demetrius' reference to his mother's flinty heart. In her exchange with Tamora Shakespeare anticipates Titus's fruitless tears and pleas to the stones, rather than the tribunes, when his sons are to be executed. Although, like her father's, Lavinia's entreaties do not stave off the impending threat, even in her confusion I do not believe she expects them to. However, she does start to see the possibility for avoiding, even rejecting, typical patterns and expected

endings. Shakespeare depicts Lavinia beginning to test received reading strategies and to learn that neither stones nor the narratives of Titus and Aaron are unchanging.

Chiron and Demetrius remind Lavinia that they are indeed their mother's sons, as Aaron later says: "I was their tutor to instruct them. / That coddling spirit had they from their mother" (V.i.98-99). However, Lavinia continues to puzzle over the possibility of behaving contrary to nature, to what might be expected. Lavinia does not expect a reprieve, but as she endures this encounter between her father's and Aaron's stories she is attracted to the idea of breaking a pattern:

'Tis true the raven doth not hatch a lark:  
Yet have I heard – O, could I find it now! –  
The lion, moved with pity, did endure  
To have his princely paws pared all away.  
Some say that ravens foster forlorn children  
The whilst their own birds famish in their nests:  
O, be to me, though thy hard heart say no,  
Nothing so kind, but something pitiful. (149-56)

In these lines Shakespeare anticipates events yet to come in the play, as the lion seems to presage Titus's self-mutilation. Although Titus does not hear Lavinia speak these lines he practically quotes her when Aaron arrives offering his imprisoned sons in return for a hand. While Lavinia acknowledges biological impossibilities even as she looks for rifts in repetition, Titus severs logic along with his hand: "O gracious emperor! O gentle Aaron! / Did ever raven sing so like a lark / That gives sweet tidings of the sun's uprise?" (III.i.157-59). This repetition evidences Titus's susceptibility to collaboration with Lavinia. As the raven Titus refers to indicates Aaron himself, so may Lavinia's raven indicate the Moor who fostered Chiron and Demetrius' desires. Yet Aaron will not abandon his own child, even in order to retain his position of power and ability to wreak havoc on Rome.

Lavinia asks Tamora to act against what she herself characterizes as the empress's vicious nature, and it is this interest in breaking patterns that so confuses Tamora. However, Lavinia does not yet fully recognize what story Aaron has written her into, and so continues to struggle with Titus's story of wholeness and chastity. Instead of asking for a broken pattern she asks Tamora to reciprocate Titus's supposedly merciful treatment of his captives, blunderingly reiterating Tamora's own pleas for mercy when Titus allowed his sons to sacrifice Alarbus.<sup>16</sup> Tamora, enraged, seizes on this parallel and places Lavinia in the position of the requiting sacrifice, a role unnervingly close to the sacrificial Lucrece role Lavinia later rejects:

Remember, boys, I poured forth tears in vain  
To save your brother from the sacrifice,  
But fierce Andronicus would not relent.  
Therefore away with her, and use her as you will;  
The worse to her the better loved of me. (II.iii.163-67)

Tamora even sets a standard by which her sons' cruelty translates to greater motherly love, affirming the relationships that Lavinia's earlier speculation sought to undermine.

This return to a reiterating structure of revenge leads Lavinia to recur to the desire for death in order to avoid rape. She asks Tamora to do what the empress actually threatened earlier in the scene and kill her:

'Tis present death I beg, and one thing more  
That womanhood denies my tongue to tell.  
O, keep me from their worse than killing lust,  
And tumble me into some loathsome pit,  
Where never man's eye may behold my body. (173-77)

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<sup>16</sup> After Lavinia is raped, Marcus refers to her mutilated body with the same language that Lucius earlier applies to Alarbus. Her body is "lopped and hewed" (II.iv.17) as "Alarbus' limbs are lopped / And entrails feed the sacrificing fire" (I.i.145-46) after Lucius asks to "hew his limbs and on a pile / *Ad manes fratrum* sacrifice his flesh" (100-101).



Lavinia's desire for death indicates her continued inscription within Titus's view of her chaste body, seeming to agree with the Virginia story that Titus later evokes. Further, Lavinia cannot speak the crime that she later makes great effort to communicate to her family. Even Demetrius, in conversation with Aaron and Chiron, acknowledges the unspeakable nature of what they intend to do. He claims he will rape Lavinia "*Sit fas aut nefas*" (II.ii.133), that is, be it speakable or unspeakable, right or wrong. Demetrius uses the same words that Ovid uses to describe Tereus' rape of Philomela: "*Fassusque nefas*" (VI.524). Unspeakable, unrepresentable though the crime of rape may be, Philomela declares her intent to reveal what Tereus has done to her. If he holds her prisoner: "*implemo silvas et conscia saxa movebo*" (VI.547) [I will fill the woods with my story and move the very rocks with pity].<sup>17</sup> In his blason Marcus credits Lavinia's lost, sweet voice with a similarly Orphean power to make her attacker drop his knife. Although her uncle attributes immobilizing powers to Lavinia that she does not possess, he does evoke her acquired ability to shape others' interpretations, the marble that before her rape seems so solid. Lavinia connects her acceptance of Lucretian sacrifice and her inability to speak of rape. Similarly, as a co-author of the play her rejection of a necessary death combines with her ability to communicate the crime.

However, Lavinia cannot yet sever herself from the repetitive defenses of her father. Even as she begs to avoid rape, she depicts it, pleading to be "tumbled," with all the term's sexual connotations, into the pit that figures as a diseased womb. Indeed, Lavinia has been read as a human version of the pit, a repository for cruelty.<sup>18</sup> In essentially pre-iterating her rape, Lavinia falls into the strategy whereby repetition, even

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<sup>17</sup> All translations of Ovid are from the Loeb editions.

<sup>18</sup> See Karen Cunningham, 141-45; Arthur Little, 51-52.

of something terrible, strives to create its own order and to avoid chaos. Her relapse reveals the danger inherent in all attempts to engage dominant narratives: the risk of being drawn back into them. This risk is particularly strong here because she does not yet know what stories are operating. Even when Lavinia comes to recognize these narratives, she continues to risk bodily harm in order to create her own.

### **Fie, treacherous hue**

In her collaborative efforts and in her near-constant exposure to interpretation, Lavinia is utterly unlike Aaron the Moor. As the authorial figure who inscribes her within the Philomela story and forces her to either choose or reject Lucrece's narrative of sacrifice, he may seem a clearer candidate for exploring Shakespeare's interest in problems of authorship than Lavinia herself. However, Lavinia is the co-authorial figure of the play, while Aaron works in isolation, using others, including Lavinia, instrumentally. Aaron serves as a foil for Shakespeare's exploration, through Lavinia, of the pressures of collaboration: the convergence of multiple narratives and multiple contributors, revision and representation, and especially constant interpretation. While Lavinia, as a collaborator, must learn to cope with and shape the narratives of others, becoming a co-author through her exposure to multiple interpretations, Aaron revels in his escape from them. He associates his skin color with others' inability to read him, condemning paler complexions: "Fie, treacherous hue, that will betray with blushing / The close enacts and counsels of thy heart" (IV.ii.117-118). Although here he scorns Chiron, Lavinia, too, blushes, a sign unreduced even by severe blood loss: "And, notwithstanding all this loss of blood, / As from a conduit with three issuing spouts, / Yet do thy cheeks look red as Titan's face / Blushing to be encountered with a cloud"

(II.iv.29-32). Although Lavinia does attempt to avoid Marcus's agonizing words, she rejects evasion of interpretation much as she does the Lucrece story of sacrifice. Before her rape she asked not only to die, but also to have her corpse hidden, "Where never man's eye may behold my body" (II.iii.177). Yet after her mutilation Lavinia does not try to hide herself from her father, despite Marcus's repeated emphasis on what sight of her will do to Titus.

Aaron celebrates his skin color as that which defies inscription, as in praising infant son: "Coal black is better than any other hue / In that it scorns to bear another hue" (IV.ii.99-100). Yet in declaring his son unmarkable, Aaron denies the societal hybridity that the bi-racial baby represents, insisting instead on the child as a copy of himself. Supposedly impervious to external influence, Aaron defines his actions by his appearance: "Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace, / Aaron will have his soul black like his face" (III.i.204-205). Aaron is not simply a bringer of chaos and confusion, an embodiment of the multiplying errors that Titus's repetitive strategies strive to guard against. Rather, he, too, adheres to patterns, as in his reaction to his son. He does not, like Lavinia, create an unfinished, liminal story, nor do others begin to copy it. Tamora, Chiron and Demetrius may do as he instructs them but they do not collaborate with him. When Lucius and his Goth army capture Aaron, the Moor's litany of crimes, although senseless, fit within the pattern Aaron has created for his life: "Even now I curse the day, and yet I think / Few came within the compass of my curse, / Wherein I did not some notorious ill" (V.ii.125-27). Aaron's daily evil acts, a process of fitting his soul to his face, are themselves a strategy for containing the multiplying echoes that even he fears, as in his concern with Chiron and Demetrius spreading their interest in Lavinia all over

the gossiping court: “The emperor’s court is like the house of fame, / The palace full of tongues, or eyes and ears: / The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf and dull” (II.i.126-28). The isolated woods muffle any cries for help, much like the isolation Aaron imposes on himself. Indeed, Aaron’s plan for the rape of Lavinia and his selection of the woods is followed in the succeeding scene by Titus’s own use of purposeful repetition: “Uncouple here and let us make a bay, / And wake the emperor and his lovely bride, / And rouse the prince, and ring a hunter’s peal, / That all the court may echo with the noise” (II.iii.3-6). Shakespeare thus links even as he opposes the interpretive strategies of these two characters.

Both Aaron and Titus tend to treat Lavinia as a text to be inscribed. Aaron’s “dainty doe” (II.ii.117) is Titus’s “dear” (III.i.91). Whether because of his determined isolation or because he scarcely comes into contact with Lavinia, for Aaron she remains one of the many legible bodies on whom he writes:

Oft have I digged up dead men from their graves  
And set them upright at their dear friends’ door  
Even when their sorrows almost was forgot,  
And on their skins as on the bark of trees,  
Have with my knife carved in Roman letters  
“Let not your sorrow die, though I am dead.” V.ii.135-140

Aaron directs both the rape of Lavinia and her mutilation, predicting the loss of her tongue while Tamora assumes her sons will kill Lavinia when they grow tired of her. Yet even in his awareness that Chiron and Demetrius may not kill Lavinia, Aaron seems to assume that she is as good as dead. He begins his confession to Lucius with a description of the rape and ends, almost in a circular structure, with this description of corpses. Titus, on the other hand, copies Lavinia in his effort to interpret her, and in so doing begins to read the opened story of broken patterns that she co-authors.

### **I'll chop off my hands too**

The stage directions for Lavinia's first entrance after her rape describe: "Lavinia, her hands cut off, and her tongue cut out, and ravished." They present the representational problem facing Lavinia in her rejection of the Lucrece story. For Lucrece, suicide represents and proves her rape, even as it purifies her of it.<sup>19</sup> In Shakespeare's *Lucrece*, published in the same year as *Titus*, Lucrece' blood is divided, some contaminated black and some innocent red, unlike Lavinia's uniform bleeding. If "ravished" specifically presents a difficulty, the other directions would seem to provide recognizable visual cues, ones that Marcus immediately identifies. Gail Kern Pastor notes: "the blood flowing from Lavinia's mutilated mouth stands for the vaginal wound that cannot be staged or represented" (98). In Pastor's reading, Lavinia's flowing blood is indicative both of the lack of control women have over their bodies and of defloration: "In a chain of dramatic metonymies, Lavinia's inability to prevent her rape is equivalent to her own inability to stop bleeding, is equivalent to her inability to speak her own bodily condition" (99). Yet if Lavinia is so easily labeled the victimized woman, why does her family fail to acknowledge her rape, indeed fail to recognize that she has not reasserted control over her body by killing herself? Lavinia clearly knows the argument that death is preferable to rape, making it central to her plea to Tamora. The male Andronici know this story as well. Defending Bassianus' abduction of Lavinia, which Saturninus terms "rape," Lucius tells Titus that he will return Lavinia "Dead, if you will, but not to be his wife, / That is another's promised love" (I.i.300-301). Nevertheless, they do not implement this logic following the rape evidenced by Lavinia's mutilated

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<sup>19</sup> See for example Arthur Little, 28.

signs. While Lavinia is repeatedly misinterpreted, for nearly three full acts the Andronici collaborate with her in a narrative that requires neither a concluding metamorphosis nor a sacrifice.

Further, Lavinia's inability to speak does not indicate an inability to communicate. This is the faulty assumption Chiron and Demetrius make, one that leads to their deaths: "Demetrius: 'So, now go tell, an if thy tongue can speak, / Who 'twas that cut thy tongue and ravished thee.' Chiron: 'Write down thy mind, bewray thy meaning so, / And if thy stumps will let thee play the scribe'" (II.iv.1-4). They suppose any communication on her part is impossible, but as Lynn Enterline notes with regard to Philomela and her weaving: "Resistance to narration . . . only induces further narrative" (4). They also assume that Lavinia is so disabled that she cannot follow the expected story: "Chiron: 'An 'twere my cause, I should go hang myself.' / Demetrius: 'If thou hadst hands to help thee knit the cord'" (II.iv.9-10). Yet hanging or stabbing oneself are hardly the only means of suicide, and Lavinia is as able to kill herself as she is to communicate. At some point between Lavinia's plea for merciful murder and her return to the stage, she ceases to see death as preferable to rape. I argue that this change occurs because through the rape she recognizes the competing stories into which she has been inscribed and which she is expected to repeat. She experiences violence and torment because of them, leading her to reject repetition as a coping strategy and to see her dismemberment not solely as enforcing limitations but also as a physical demonstration of her body's unfinished, composite nature and of the possibility of refusing what might otherwise seem inevitable ends. Indeed, through the rape Lavinia becomes capable not simply of rejecting one tale or another, but of manipulating them all.

Marcus's blason of Lavinia again dismembers her even as he tries to reconstruct a perfect body that never existed. He quickly associates her with the Philomela story and concludes that her lost tongue means he should speak for her:

But sure some Tereus hath deflowered thee,  
And, lest thou shouldst detect him, cut thy tongue.  
Ah, now thou turn'st thy face away for shame,  
And, notwithstanding all this loss of blood,  
As from a conduit with three issuing spouts,  
Yet do thy cheeks look red as Titan's face  
Blushing to be encountered with a cloud.  
Shall I speak for thee? Shall I say 'tis so? II.iv.26-33

Marcus offers to put words in Lavinia's mouth, presaging Titus's own attempts at interpretation. These efforts have been labeled critically as yet another try at, if not the ultimate silencing of, Lavinia, depriving her of her own words and ventriloquizing her with patriarchal language. However, not only does Lavinia retain and even enhance her ability to work with given narratives and to create her own, I also argue that Marcus's attempts to speak for Lavinia are a key factor in bringing on what Coppelia Kahn calls "Marcus's amnesia" (58). This refers to his clear recognition of the Philomela story above, yet his great puzzlement, along with Titus, when Lavinia forces them to read *The Metamorphoses*.

Obedient as she seemed to be before, after her rape Lavinia ought to be easy to manage, yet Marcus's confusion, like Ravenscroft's revisionary anxiety, indicates otherwise. Initially Marcus is eager to tell the Philomela story for her, but the more he dwells on Lavinia's physically revised body and on the difference between Lavinia and the story, her severed tongue and hands and supposedly concomitant inability to express herself, the more he himself seems to lose the ability to tell the tale. Speaking about the "craftier Tereus" (41) who "cut" her "mean(s)" (40) of communication, he forgets his

desire to confront the perpetrator. As Marcus reconstructs Lavinia's "lily hands" (44) and "sweet tongue" (49) he loses the command he earlier asserts over vocal communication and focuses on the visual, on what the sight of Lavinia is doing to him and what it will do to her father: "Come, let us go and make thy father blind, / For such a sight will blind a father's eye" (52-53). Here Lavinia resembles another rape victim, Medusa, who after being raped by Neptune in Minerva's temple is turned by the goddess into a Gorgon that changes all men who look on her into stone. What seems an unwarranted punishment of the victim in fact enables Medusa to punish men as she could not the offending god. Lavinia does not turn her father to stone, but she can potentially blind him. While it is true that both Marcus and Titus focus on the impact Lavinia's rape has on them more often than they consider its effect on her, under the influence of encroaching amnesia Marcus makes his niece the author, the one who causes their blindness to the sacrifice narrative.

When Marcus presents the wounded Lavinia to her father and brother, Titus is already weeping, mourning the impending execution of his sons. In a scene brimming with tears and ocean imagery, her appearance oversaturates the Andronici: "What fool hath added water to the sea / Or brought a faggot to bright-burning Troy? / My grief was at the height before thou cam'st / And now like Nilus it disdaineth bounds" (III.i.68-71). In his initial response to Lavinia, Titus recurs to the Trojan myth that he had hoped Lavinia would reiterate. Her violated "lively body" (105) no longer the preserve of some eternal body of the Roman state, he cannot quite let that narrative pass. Now the repetition that he suffers is pointless and uncontrolled, yet his own impulse for purposeful repetition remains. His old story shattered, now Titus responds to Lavinia:



She is the weeping welkin, I the earth:  
Then must my sea be moved with her sighs,  
Then must my earth with her continual tears  
Become a deluge, overflowed and drowned,  
For why my bowels cannot hide her woes,  
But like a drunkard must I vomit them. III.i. 226-31

Titus describes his reaction to Lavinia's mutilation as a bodily reflex, involuntary repetition. His repeated references to tears – in his refusal of the saturated handkerchiefs that Lucius and Marcus offer, in his claims to interpret Lavinia: “She says she drinks no other drink but tears” (III.ii.37) – may seem an attempt to attribute to Lavinia his own overwhelming emotions. However, his emphasis on tears relates at least in part to the few lines that Lavinia and Titus exchange together. Lavinia first enters to mourn her dead brothers: “Lo, at this tomb my tributary tears / I render for my brethren's obsequies” (I.i.162-63). When Titus, confronted with the heads of his sons and his own severed hand, refuses to cry he quotes his daughter: “this sorrow is an enemy, / And would usurp upon my wat'ry eyes / And make them blind with tributary tears” (III.i.267-69). As he recalls his daughter's tears he also references the threat of blindness that she poses.

Like Marcus, Titus seems to forget both his original narrative of Lavinia's chastity and the sacrifice narrative that should now apply in focusing on the visual impact of Lavinia's dismemberment. His willingness to mutilate himself, anticipating Aaron's request for a hand, is linked both to his focus on Lavinia's supposed inability to communicate and to his desire to translate her signs. When Titus first declares, “Give me a sword: I'll chop off my hands too” (III.i.72), he stresses the inefficacy of his and indeed all hands: “'Tis well, Lavinia, that thou hast no hands, / For hands to do Rome service is but vain” (79-80). Confronted with chaos, Titus despairs of his narrative about Lavinia and Rome, but in fact he deeply regrets Lavinia's loss: “Thou hast no hands to wipe away

thy tears, / Nor tongue to tell me who hath martyred thee” (106-107). He asks that she “make some sign how I may do thee ease” (121) and all his suggestions for relief have to do with tears and copying her wounds: “Or shall we cut away our hands like thine? / Or shall we bite our tongues and in dumb shows / Pass the remainder of our hateful days?” (130-32). As Titus begins to apply his repetitive strategies to Lavinia he feels capable of understanding her, thus his ecstatic: “Mark, Marcus, mark! I understand her signs!” (143). After giving his hand to Aaron, Titus feels even more able to communicate with Lavinia, not realizing that as he copies her dismemberment he distances himself from the expected sacrifice and begins to collaborate in Lavinia’s openended tale.

Titus retains a sense that Lavinia ought to kill herself, but in his perhaps intentional failure to recognize her rape that sense remains undefined. Like Chiron and Demetrius, Titus asserts that Lavinia cannot kill herself. When he floats the seeming impossibility that she hold a knife in her teeth (the same teeth that recently held his hand) and cut a sluice to her heart whereby her tears might drown it, he may surreptitiously, gruesomely recognize that Lavinia is capable of committing suicide. However, he is quickly rebuked by Marcus for encouraging Lavinia “to lay / Such violent hands upon her tender life” (III.ii.21-22), indicating how far the Andronici have strayed from the sacrifice narrative. Although in Livy’s and Shakespeare’s versions of Lucrece male family members oppose her expressed intention to commit suicide, the Andronici men are lead by Lavinia’s persistent survival to avoid, indeed even forget that possibility. Instead of arguing with Lavinia about her response to rape, they accept her course of action.

Titus's reply to Marcus's reprimand indicates his own struggle with the repetitive reading strategies he continues to employ:

Ah, wherefore dost thou urge the name of hands,  
To bid Aeneas tell the tale twice ov'r  
How Troy was burnt and he made miserable?  
O, handle not the theme, to talk of hands,  
Lest we remember that we have none.  
Fie, fie, how frantically I square my talk,  
As if we should forget we have no hands  
If Marcus did not name the word of hands! III.ii.26-33

The tale of Aeneas, preserver of the Trojans, father of Rome, and husband of Lavinia, has become something Titus finds too painful to reiterate. In this exchange, hands take on the liminal role proposed by Rowe as body parts and tools, a link between the intent to commit suicide and the means by which to do so. For Titus as for Marcus, the absence of this "mean" makes intent irrelevant, indeed cancels the possibility of such intention altogether. Lavinia cannot, like Lucrece, call on her hand to purify her body: "Poor hand, why quiver'st thou at this decree? / Honor thyself to rid me of this shame; / For if I die, my honor lives in thee, / But if I live, thou liv'st in my defame" (1030-33). They still see Lavinia's dismemberment, and her life, as a handicap, while for Lavinia the unfinished nature of her body helps to avoid Lucrece's sacrificial end. Arthur Little essentially makes Titus and Marcus's argument: "the hand being iconographically the authorizing agent of the woman's stealing back her whiteness and virginity" (10). I argue that Lavinia's collaborative effort is not in any way recuperative. She cannot reclaim the ideal double body Titus attributes to her pre-rape existence because it never existed, the state never as pure nor his daughter as sweetly submissive as he believes. The double body of the sacrifice narrative cannot recover a society that was itself a hybrid even before Lavinia, through her rape, recognizes it as such. The refounding of Rome that

would supposedly result from sacrifice now seems impossible to Titus and Marcus, a tribute to Lavinia's developing co-authorial abilities. However, her collaborative aim is to make them acknowledge the hybridity of the state and eventually her place within it.

For Titus the myths that once served as paradigms on which to pattern himself become a kind of sedative, a means of escape. He even imagines that the current troubles of his family will become a legend, albeit one Lavinia cannot participate in plotting: "let those of us that have tongues / Plot some device of further misery, /To make us wondered at in time to come" (III.i.133-35). He is unaware that in copying Lavinia he has already involved her in the "device" of the Andronici's revenge. Titus assumes that Lavinia, too, will enjoy passing the time with "sad stories" until their own becomes one:

Come, take away, Lavinia, go with me.  
I'll to thy closet and go read with thee  
Sad stories chanced in times of old.  
Come, boy, and go with me. Thy sight is young,  
And thou shalt read when mine begin to dazzle. III.ii.81-85

Titus attempts to create a continuum in which Lucius is heir to his stories, a successor to his repetitive reading strategy. However, as the following act shows, Lucius has been educated by Lavinia and is smart enough to fear her.

### **But thou art deeper read and better skilled**

When at the start of Act IV scene i young Lucius tears on stage with Lavinia in aggressive pursuit, the boy may seem as puzzled by her behavior as Titus and Marcus. However, he appears to know that in the Philomela story her nephew does not fare well. Even as Lavinia gestures with the stumps of her arms and paws through the pile of books Lucius dropped in fright, Titus and Marcus continue to be almost inexplicably baffled, recalling her longstanding love of reading or affection for Lucius's mother, who gave him

*The Metamorphoses*, by way of explanation.<sup>20</sup> Lucius at least offers a plausible suggestion, explaining that he fears Lavinia may be mad because of Titus's emphasis on madness and grief but also because of Ovid: "And I have read that Hecuba of Troy / Ran mad for sorrow" (IV.i.20-21). Lucius selects the popular schoolboy exemplar of grief, the woman ventriloquized by Lucrece in Shakespeare's poem. By introducing the Hecuba story of grief and revenge, Shakespeare emphasizes not only the many stories circulating around Lavinia but also her rejection of ventriloquization and the extreme difficulty the Andronici have in trying to put words in her mouth. The narratives that have become tools for her remain means of passing the time for Titus: "But thou art deeper read and better skilled: / Come and take choice of all my library, / And so beguile thy sorrow, till the heavens / Reveal the damned contriver of this deed" (33-36). Although ignorant of Lavinia's ability to communicate and to co-author, Titus is correct about Lavinia's skill. The question then becomes, why would she want to tell the story of her attack? Why would she select one of many possible narratives to tell that story?

Revenge initially seems a plausible motivation, but Lavinia has already chosen survival. If vengeance were worth her own death, she could already have killed herself to spark Andronici retribution. Her family has forgotten to reiterate Lucrece' story in repeating Lavinia's scars. Lavinia's composite nature, her failure to fit into and reiterate one story makes Titus and Marcus extremely resistant to her contribution of information and to acknowledging her rape. She must fight aggressively, even physically, to force them to read the story of Philomela at all, struggling to write the crime that not long ago

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<sup>20</sup> By linking *The Metamorphoses* to Lucius's mother as well as to Lavinia, Shakespeare emphasizes an alternative structure of knowledge transmission within the family, in contrast to the one originating with Titus.

was for her unutterable. Yet in providing her father and uncle with an obvious narrative she risks reminding them that she ought not be alive, risks being drawn back into a tale she rejects. Even in choosing the story of Philomela, who participates in plotting and executing revenge, Lavinia must be aware that she cannot exclude other tales. Soon after Titus exclaims, “Lavinia, wert thou thus surprised, sweet girl, / Ravished and wronged as Philomela was, / Forced in the ruthless, vast and gloomy woods?” (51-53), he makes the connection to Lucrece: “Or slunk not Saturnine, as Tarquin erst, / That left the camp to sin in Lucrece’ bed?” (63-64). Lavinia successfully uses *The Metamorphoses* to revise others’ interpretations of her wounded body, but by intervening takes a risk that finds fruition in her death.

I argue that Lavinia asserts herself through signs, reading and finally writing in order to tell a story that in combining many others becomes something all her own. When Lavinia writes “stuprum” in the earth she stakes a claim for her survival and for a place in Roman society for women apparently taken out of the reproductive, repetitive chain. Her rejection of repetition culminates in an assertion of her productivity, alongside the importance of collaboration, as one capable of manipulating multiple narratives as none around her can. The suitability and potential benefit of opened, non-repetitive collaboration is further demonstrated by the absence in Rome of (re)productive mothers. Tamora is the play’s only mother, and in giving birth to a child she commands be killed hardly stakes a claim for valuing women solely on the basis of their reproductive role. The empress bases her position of power on maintaining the illusion of a pure Rome, as does Aaron in plotting the substitution of an infant that appears to be white, while Lavinia strives to dismantle such artifice. Rather than

purifying Rome by eliminating all the tainted women, Lavinia argues for her own survival on the basis not of her purity but of her impurity, her composite nature and collaborative skills.

I earlier asserted the connection in Lavinia's plea for death between her acceptance of the sacrifice narrative, her inability to speak the crime of rape and her desire to hide her body. Shakespeare's Lucrece is unable to write to her husband about her rape, but can only ask him to return home:

Her maid is gone, and she prepares to write,  
First hovering o'er the paper with her quill;  
Conceit and grief an eager combat fight;  
What wit sets down is blotted straight with will;  
This is too curious good, this blunt and ill.  
Much like a press of people at a door  
Throng her inventions, which shall go before. 1296-1302

Lucrece' mind and paper are crowded with possible ways to phrase her rape, but they cancel each other out. Lavinia, too, has a myriad of stories available to her, many potential ways to tell her rape, but she does not allow them to negate each other, leaving her only with the option of negating herself. Her ability to write as Lucrece cannot be indicative not only of her rejection of the sacrifice story but of her capacity for combining and manipulating stories, even that of Lucrece, rather than accepting or discarding them in their entirety. She revises "Sad stories chanced in times of old" and collaborates even with her resistant family. The reversal of the three elements from her plea to Tamora, completed in the communication of the rape, are dangerous but necessary moves by which Lavinia tells the story of her continued, indeed increased relevance to her society.

While it is true that Lavinia writes in the manner that Marcus directs, holding his staff in her mouth and using her forearms to scrawl the crime and the names of those who

committed it, the word she uses is not found in Ovid: “*Stuprum. Chiron. Demetrius*” (IV.i.78).<sup>21</sup> “Stuprum” can be another term for rape, particularly stressing unchastity, disgrace and dishonor and lacking any connotations of abduction. In choosing this word, Lavinia not only rejects the implication of “raptus” that she herself is property, she also stresses her unchastity. Although she specifically links herself to Philomela, she makes an argument similar to that of Lucrece, both in the original Livy and in Shakespeare’s poem. While the men around her at least suggest her innocence, noting the distinction between bodily violation and mental and spiritual guilt, Lucrece insists on the connection between her mind and body. Lucrece asserts that the body will pollute her mind with guilt, a contention that leads her to suicide. Lavinia argues for her survival and indeed productivity in Roman society on the basis of that connection. Her recognition of the multiple tales into which others attempt to inscribe her is ultimately facilitated by her rape, enabling her in turn to manipulate those stories. Lavinia’s use of Marcus’s staff, placing it in her mouth, may be a reenactment of the rape or an image of fellatio, but occurring simultaneously with Lavinia’s intervention and reinterpretation it further emphasizes the link between mind and body, rape and amalgamation, mutilation and openended collaboration. This is not to argue that Lavinia’s writing is a wholly empowering move. Her actions as well as her word choice emphasize her weakness and victimization as she struggles for what would certainly be a subordinate place, but at least a place, in the Rome not of her father’s imaginings but the hybrid of Shakespeare’s.

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<sup>21</sup> In Ravenscroft’s version Titus spontaneously intuits Lavinia’s rape without *The Metamorphoses*, and he, not Marcus, demonstrates by writing “rape” in the ground with one of young Lucius’s arrows. Ravenscroft also alters the order of events, placing the revelation of Lavinia’s rape before the appearance of his sons’ severed heads, thus preventing Lavinia from being even the key instigating factor in the revenge, let alone a co-author.



The information Lavinia provides spurs the Andronici revenge. Like Lavinia's rape, the targets for that revenge seem obvious, yet are overlooked until she definitively gives the Andronici Chiron and Demetrius and dissuades Titus from his Livy-driven assumption that the emperor must be directly responsible. Titus and Marcus are even uncertain of who killed Bassianus, and have yet to really rule out even Titus's executed sons. Although Titus swears his family, including Lavinia, to vengeance after Martius and Quintus are beheaded, nothing is done to implement this vow until Lavinia intervenes. Yet revealing the names of her attackers serves not to provide otherwise unattainable information or to satisfy Lavinia's own desire for revenge, but rather to demonstrate to her resistant family the applicability of her co-authorship skills. Yet while revenge is insufficient to motivate Lavinia's story of unchaste, collaborative survival this does not mean that she is uninterested in revenge. She helps to shape the revenge plot and chooses to participate in a violent act of vengeance that, like her insistence on communicating the rape, places her in dangerous proximity to the sacrifice narrative.

Lavinia's intervention initially seems to work, its perils avoided as the possibility of her survival as a raped woman possessing useful skills remains viable. Although Titus and Marcus begin to recur to their old habits, inserting themselves as characters in the sacrifice narrative, they continue to include Lavinia in their plans and neither kill her nor make references to suicide. For example, Marcus rededicates the family to revenge:

My lord, kneel down with me; Lavinia, kneel;  
And kneel, sweet boy, the Roman Hector's hope;  
And swear with me, as with the woeful fere  
And father of that chaste dishonored dame,  
Lord Junius Brutus sware for Lucrece' rape;  
That we will prosecute by good advice  
Mortal revenge upon these traitorous Goths IV.i.87-93

The Trojan narrative resurfaces in Lucius's identification with the doomed hero, Hector, as does emphasis on Lavinia's prior chastity. Yet even as Marcus identifies himself with Brutus, who took up Lucrece's call for revenge while her father and husband stood grieving, who took up the very knife with which she stabbed herself, he still does not acknowledge that his Lucrece is alive.

Titus in particular seems reinvigorated both by the information Lavinia provides and by the claim she stakes in providing it. Titus's instinct to repeat remains, as with his desire to memorialize the words Lavinia writes: "I will go get a leaf of brass, / And with a gad of steel will write these words" (IV.i.102-103). His need to reiterate Lavinia's writing is of a piece with his willingness to cut off his hand, evidence of his repetition of her unfinished story instead of the Lucrece story he might otherwise expect. Yet he also begins to treat narratives as potential tools, making that connection literal in the lines of Horace he sends to Chiron and Demetrius wrapped around a selection of weapons. Even the seemingly mad messages he has shot by arrow to the gods betray a perspective that may admit to multiple stories not as means of passing the time and forgetting one's own troubles but as useful elements in the crafting of the revenge plot. When Tamora and her sons dress up as Revenge, Murder and Rape and attempt to insert themselves into what they believe is Titus's overarching narrative of madness and grief, he easily sees through it. However, this does not mean that Titus has given up his old, reiterative coping strategy, his habit of inserting himself into preexisting tales and finding stability in repeating them. While Lavinia has revealed to Titus the potential usefulness of the composite society around him, she has also provided him with a narrative by which he may imagine all hybridity and corruption might be purged. Titus ultimately cannot

accept the interruption of the Roman genealogy he insists upon from the outset of the play. His revenge comes to fruition because he copies Lavinia, but he can copy her only so far before having, like her, to reject repetition. Rather than do so, he kills her.

### **Sheathing the steel in my advent'rous body**

Her participation in the execution of her rapists is another proof of Lavinia's collaborative role. Even after asserting her status as a rape victim she remains an active part of the family whose other members have been successfully distanced from the sacrifice narrative. By contributing to the murders, Lavinia demonstrates the utter falsity of Chiron and Demetrius' earlier predictions, proving her ability to "play the scribe" and placing them in the position of helplessness they ascribed to her. However, Lavinia's participation, like the decision to force the Andronici to acknowledge her rape, is a dangerous move. The more she reveals her ability to act decisively the harder it becomes for Titus and Marcus to deny that, helpless though she is, Lavinia could kill herself. Further, the elimination of her enemies will leave Lavinia as a living reminder of their crimes, the sole focus for her father's recuperative plans. Only by convincing Titus not only that Rome should not be returned to his pure ideal but that it cannot be because that ideal, like the body Marcus attempts to reconstruct for Lavinia in his blason, never existed, can she avoid becoming the dangerous center of his attention. Direct involvement in the deaths of Chiron and Demetrius certainly risks making her that focus. Yet both the desire for revenge and the assertion of her collaborative position by which she could fit within a composite state are important enough for Lavinia to take that risk.

Lavinia holds the basin for collecting the brothers' blood as it drains from their slit throats. Yet that very ingredient, although one of many that will go into the

cannibalistic pie, also fits into a repetitive ideal of retribution. Even as Lavinia continues to act as a co-author, Titus's strategy reappears: their wicked blood for her chaste blood, their inability to speak for her inability to speak:

Both her sweet hands, her tongue, and that more dear  
Than hands or tongue, her spotless chastity,  
Inhuman traitors, you constrained and forced.  
What would you say if I should let you speak?  
Villains, for shame you would not beg for grace.  
Hark, wretches, how I mean to martyr you.  
This one hand yet is left to cut your throats  
Whiles that Lavinia 'tween her stumps doth hold  
The basin that receives your guilty blood. V.ii.175-83

Titus's emphasis on Lavinia's lost "spotlessness" indicates his continued valuation of her lost, chaste body over and above her newer skills. Even more telling is his branding of Chiron and Demetrius as "traitors." Although Lucius, fighting with the Goths against Rome, seems to better fit the term, Titus sees their crimes against Lavinia as crimes against the state. He even uses the same term for Chiron and Demetrius, "martyr," that he uses for Lavinia's "martyred signs" (III.ii.36). Although Titus goes on to reference two other Ovidian stories in his condemnation of the brothers and plans for the approaching feast, those of Philomela and the battle between the Lapiths and the Centaurs, he clearly remains attached to his original narrative of chastity.<sup>22</sup>

The potential for such continued dedication to the narrative of chastity to become a belated enactment of the sacrifice narrative is fulfilled in Titus's murder of Lavinia. In the final scene, Lavinia's appearance veiled is indicative of the male Andronici's return to the Lucrece story, bound up in Lavinia's own words with the visibility of her body. Yet even now Titus cannot take responsibility for what he intends to do, instead styling

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<sup>22</sup> For the battle between the Lapiths and Centaurs at Hippodamia and Pirithous' wedding feast see *The Metamorphoses* Book XII, 210-535.

himself as the servant of the emperor and asking Saturninus a thinly veiled hypothetical: “Was it well done of rash Virginius / To slay his daughter with his own right hand, / Because she was enforced, stained and deflowered?” (V.iii.36-38). Knowing that he comes to the conclusion that Lavinia should die much too late, Titus calls Virginius “rash.” Titus’s emphasis on the “right hand,” the hand he gave up in copying Lavinia, is yet another indication that he is interpreting the story incorrectly, having failed to follow the model he proposes by killing Lavinia neither before nor directly after her rape. In reasserting the sacrifice narrative, Titus tries to recreate the nonexistent world in which his right hand was perfectly efficacious. Saturninus gives Titus exactly the answer he wants, yes: “Because the girl should not survive her shame, / And by her presence still renew his sorrows” (41-42). Lavinia would serve for Titus not only as a reminder of his own failures over the course of the play, but also of the mistaken narrative on which he based his entire life. Having once used Lavinia as a pattern for his actions, forgetting the sacrifice story, Titus before his own death embraces: “A pattern, precedent and lively warrant / For me, most wretched, to perform the like. / Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee, / And with thy shame thy father’s sorrow die!” (44-47). As he clings to his insufficient strategy of repetition in killing his daughter, even his words are repetitive, a chant of shame and sorrow to which he pins his flimsy hopes of purgation. His explanation of his actions reveals not only delayed adherence to a pattern but also the retributive recognition that Lavinia herself led him to overlook it in the first place: “Killed her for whom my tears have made me blind” (49). She oversaturated her father and induced him to copy her, rather than repeat the Lucrece narrative.

After the spasm of carnage that leaves Tamora, Titus and Saturninus dead, Lavinia's story of productive collaboration continues to trouble attempts at consolidation. The remaining Romans seem to recur to Titus's idea of restoration and his Trojan genealogy. Marcus speaks of returning "These broken limbs again into one body" (V.iii.72), while an unnamed lord tells Lucius:

Speak, Rome's dear friend, as erst our ancestor,  
When with his solemn tongue he did discourse  
To lovesick Dido's sad-attending ear  
The story of that baleful burning night  
When subtle Greeks surprise King Priam's Troy.  
Tell us what Sinon hath bewitched our ears,  
Or who hath brought the fatal engine in  
That gives our Troy, our Rome, the civil wound. 80-87

In addition to the strong resurgence of association between Rome and Troy, the Romans desire the reassurance of a single source of contagion, a guilty party who caused the breach in otherwise solid walls. They want obvious divisions, a clear culprit and verification of their state's purity. In order to give them this story, Lucius must disown his sister and excise her emphasis on multiple narratives, replacing it with the story of his banishment and restoration.

Earlier in the play, Lucius strongly links himself with Lavinia. Before he departs to join the Goth army he asserts that they share a kind of half-life, his that of banishment and hers that of living after rape:

But now nor Lucius nor Lavinia lives  
But in oblivion and hateful griefs.  
If Lucius live, he will requite your wrongs  
And make proud Saturnine and his empress  
Beg at the gates like Tarquin and his queen. III.i.294-98

Lucius retains a strong sense of the Lucrece narrative, using it to justify his intended revenge and linking Saturninus with Tarquin as Titus and Marcus do only after Lavinia

intervenes to force their acknowledgement of her rape. Yet even Lucius does not trouble the fact that she is alive, not the purifying sacrifice of the Lucrece story. Despite being absent for several of the scenes in which Lavinia particularly emphasizes her facility with multiple narratives, he, too, is drawn if not to copy his sister then at least to closely associate himself with her. Lucius recognizes the pressure to sever that bond. However, even as he makes his claim for rule Lavinia and her rejection of the sacrifice narrative remain evident: "I am the turned-forth, be it known to you, / That have preserved her welfare in my blood / And from her bosom took the enemy's point, / Sheathing the steel in my advent'rous body" (V.iii.109-12). Lucius is explicitly speaking of a feminized Rome, but along with the state he speaks of the sister often associated with it, whose body he tried to revenge where he could not rescue. He again links himself as banished outcast with Lavinia, and Rome, as raped woman, both without a place in society. Lucius positions himself as Brutus, taking the knife from the body of Lucrece in order to rescue the state, but also serves as his own Lucrece, willingly enacting the repetitive, purifying penetration that Lavinia rejects. Although he tries to conform to Titus's narratives of pure, Trojan Rome and of the sacrifice required to restore it, Lucius cannot completely shake the connection with his sister, the sense that neither of them has a place in Rome. Although Lavinia failed to secure a space for herself while Lucius becomes emperor, in so doing Lucius helps to perpetuate her openended narrative. He offers his body up as a text for interpretation, much as hers was: "My scars can witness, dumb although they are, / That my report is just and full of truth" (114-15). Lucius recognizes that speech is not essential to the telling of a story, using his battle scars to vouch not only for his military experience but also for the otherwise unrelated tale of family pain.

Like Lucius, Marcus also tries to verify the rightness of the Andronici's actions and the truthfulness of their story by offering to reenact the sacrifice Lavinia refused to make. Speaking for Lucius and his son, Marcus declares that if found wanting: "The poor remainder of the Andronici / Will hand in hand all headlong hurl ourselves / And on the ragged stones beat forth our souls" (131-33). However, in addition to rejecting suicide as a proof of innocence, Lavinia has already demonstrated to her family the integral connection between mind and body. The remaining Andronici are necessarily changed by the crimes that they have both experienced and perpetrated and cannot negate their actions by destroying themselves. Lucius's aim "To heal Rome's harms and wipe away her woe" (148) is impossible.

This impossibility is made particularly clear by young Lucius. As a part of their bid for power, Lucius and Marcus strive not only to distance themselves from Lavinia but also to stress their link to Titus and to shore up his shaky version of the sacrifice narrative. Although Lavinia dies, the collaborative impulse does not die with her. The opened story she begins, asserting the usefulness of her collaborative skills in a Rome that acknowledges a hybrid present rather than focusing on a mythical lineage, stretches beyond the end of the play. Shakespeare emphasizes Lavinia's role as teacher of her nephew Lucius, a position that Titus validates. Yet after both their deaths the elder Lucius attempts to substitute Titus in that role, a move that his son does not fully accept, choosing to remain silent rather than accept Titus as the teller of "pretty tales" (V.iii.165): "O Lord, I cannot speak to him for weeping; / My tears will choke me if I ope my mouth" (174-75). While this may appear an overwhelming expression of grief for his grandfather, it also references Lavinia, who blinded her father with weeping. In addition



to acknowledging Titus's motivation for killing Lavinia, that she blinded him to the sacrifice narrative, Lucius also recalls Titus telling Lavinia to drown her own heart. Lucius puts himself not in the position of heir to his grandfather, but of heir to his aunt, told to still her heart and refusing. The conclusion of *Titus* offers the illusion of a restored and purified Rome able to go on reiterating its past glories. However, as young Lucius's reluctance indicates, Lavinia's opened story remains with her uncle, brother and nephew, a pervasive sense of the narratives in circulation around them and a need for someone who can utilize them.

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