

# Callie Kimball's *The Rape of Lucrece* (2007): A Woman's Creative Response to Shakespeare's Poem

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## Abstract

Though from their inception Shakespeare's works have been re-written, re-structured, and re-created in countless adaptations and appropriations, *The Rape of Lucrece* has rarely been recently included in this practice. After a brief survey of reasons why *The Rape of Lucrece* is generally excluded from contemporary critical discourse and has rarely been treated as an inspiration for interpreting one's own national history and literature, the main part of the essay presents Callie Kimball's creative response to Shakespeare's poem. The dramaturgical adaptation of this young American playwright, theater director, and actor was staged by the Washington Shakespeare Company, Washington, D.C., as a part of the 2007 annual Shakespeare Festival. Though this first ever woman's rendition of the poem was not of a feminist character, Kimball's appropriation attempted to establish Lucrece in the context of her time and world, while making her choices not just understandable, but inevitable to a modern audience. Both the text and the production suggest women's growing immunity to men's attempts to subject and objectify them in literary texts, culture, politics, and daily life.

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(A film clip is available in the HTML version of this document.)

Though from their inception Shakespeare's works have been re-written, re-structured, and re-created in various adaptations, his poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* have rarely been so.<sup>1</sup> Even a cursory survey of the various appropriations of Shakespeare's work across the world indicates that for a number of reasons — prominence, cultural and political relevance, controversy, historical taste, and circumstances — it is mainly Shakespeare's plays that generate "the desire," as Jacques Derrida calls this phenomenon in a different context, "to launch" the already written texts in as many different forms as possible (1985, 157-58). In other words, his non-dramatic texts somehow escape the interest of writers who capitalize on the potential of variability, openness, and plurality present in Shakespeare's work, which triggers their desire to respond to and frequently "perfect" him in an adaptive process.

Since in Elizabethan times the popularity of *The Rape of Lucrece* contributed greatly to Shakespeare's reputation and fame,<sup>2</sup> the current marginal status of the poem is disconcerting. First published in 1594, it went through eight editions before 1640 (Halliday 1964, 402), and Patrick Cheney, presenting the enthusiastic response of the poem's first readers, convincingly argues that *The Rape of Lucrece* must have helped Shakespeare to forge his identity as a publishing author and poet. After the poem's publication, Shakespeare suddenly became a "national poet-playwright" whose name sold books (Cheney 2004, 142).

*Lucrece*'s popularity in the 1600s and the number of critical and interpretative works devoted to it helped to contemporize the poem's text for early modern readers.<sup>3</sup> Countless creative responses to the poem entered into dialogue with Shakespeare's original, altering, and even implicitly correcting his reflective and rhetorical treatment of the story. It is enough to compare Shakespeare's version with Thomas Middleton's poem *The Ghost of Lucrece* (1600), Thomas Heywood's play *The Rape of Lucrece* (printed 1608), and John Fletcher's *Valentinian* (1610-1614). Concentrating on the two main themes of Shakespeare's original — rape and politics — these adaptations/analogues revealed more about their own culture and values, both social and literary, than about the Shakespearean text.<sup>4</sup>

These themes, unfortunately, very seldom attract the interest of modern playwrights, who seem to share George Wyndham's opinion, delivered at the end of the nineteenth century:

Excepting in the last speech and in the death of Lucrece, the Poem is nowhere dramatic. It tells a story, but at each situation the Poet pauses to survey and to illustrate the romantic and emotional values of the relation between his characters, or to analyze the moral passions and the mental debates in any one of them, or even the physiological perturbations responding to these storms and tremors of the mind and soul. (Wyndham 1898, xvi)

Characterized as lacking dramaturgical qualities, *The Rape of Lucrece* is generally regarded as a terse and clear-cut tale that presents in lyrical and descriptive form a series of suggestions for a full-scale exercise; theatrical renditions are usually limited to dramatic readings of Shakespeare's text.<sup>5</sup> Yet, in light of the twentieth century's critical response to *The Rape of Lucrece*, it is indeed amazing that the poem is generally beyond the scope of modern playwrights' interest. After all, no one can deny that from the structural point of view, *Lucrece* possesses a well-defined "conflict and an intriguing central idea: a sick symbiosis between victim and criminal that hand-wringing can't ignore but that a higher moral ground could address" (Koehler 1991, 16). The poem demonstrates that sexual atrocities against women create or forestall the possibility of a certain kind of political

response: in a way, *Lucrece* reminds us that in most cases, the sexualization of violence can create a political bond among some men. In addition, the poem reveals that the treatment of rape victims by society has not changed over the centuries, and today, as in Shakespeare's *Lucrece*, it is often a woman's body that seems to ignite political action, though its materiality is neglected and forgotten.

Though Shakespeare's works — especially his plays — are generally regarded as a source of commentary on universal values and concerns, this generalization does not apply to *The Rape of Lucrece*. Consequently, no one found it inspirational when, in the 1990s, international attention frequently focused on the use of rape as an element of political upheavals, which brought the change of political systems in many countries all over the world.<sup>6</sup> The United Nations commission and various human rights groups revealed, for example, that ethnic Serb paramilitary groups had systematically tolerated or even encouraged the raping of Bosnian Muslim women. Rape was employed frequently by Hutu troops against Tutsi women in the genocide campaign Hutu leaders conducted in Rwanda in 1994. In 1998, women who identified with secular culture in Algeria accused desperate rebels fighting in the name of the Islamic revolution of kidnapping them and making them sex slaves. In Indonesia, reports were surfacing that suggested that members of the security forces might have been among the men who raped ethnic Chinese women during rioting in May 1998 (Crossette 1998). The recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have brought the issue of rape and its political dimension again into focus; it is beyond the scope of this work to register the violent cases of women's victimization, treated usually as a "by-product" of warfare reported on daily by the international press and Internet. In times of peace, rape charges connected with politics are a frequent phenomenon. For example, in Poland they contributed to the dissolution of the political coalition in power in 2007. The *Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc* [Law and Justice] party dissolved its political alliance with the *Samobrona* [Self-Defense] party, whose leader was accused of rape. Consequently, an earlier parliamentary election took place, and the Polish political scene was radically changed.<sup>7</sup> In 2011, Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian Prime Minister who appears to have turned one of his residences into a brothel, and the recent event connected with Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the head of the International Monetary Fund who allegedly raped a chambermaid, are other examples of this behavioral pattern among men in high positions. Assuming vicariously Tarquin's identity, these men, as the new masters of the universe — politicians, bankers, industrialists, and media tycoons — appear to believe that they have the right to anything they want, including rape and brutal assaults upon women.

One explanation for a lack of interest in *The Rape of Lucrece* on the part of creative writers is probably the poem's current unpopularity and lack of familiarity for Shakespeare's readers, who

see Shakespeare chiefly as a playwright. The ideas conveyed in an exciting array of critical works, as well as responses to the poem, do not reach the general public because they are not "translated" into theatrical form. Because contemporary playwrights do not use *The Rape of Lucrece* as a vehicle to present local concerns, the poem becomes marginalized as material for appropriation. Twentieth-century attempts at turning the poem into a play so far have not established themselves as sufficiently engaging to be revived, or even remembered. One took place in 1931 when Andre Obey (1892-1975), who worked closely with Jacques Copeau (1879-1949) and his theatrical Compaigne des Quize (est. 1929), presented his *Le Viol de Lucrece* (*The Rape of Lucretia*).<sup>8</sup> The play was translated into English by Thornton Wilder and produced in Cleveland and New York in 1932, unfortunately without much success.<sup>9</sup> This work highlights the female perspective through the innovative addition of two "Greek" choristers, one male and one female, who describe the action, comment on events as they unfold in the drama, and confront the audience regarding Lucrece's decision to commit suicide. Through the dialogue of these two choristers, the audience is presented with the starkly different points of view of the men and of the single woman in the play. The other creative adaptation was presented at the London Almeida Theatre in 1988. Its author Bardy Thomas paired *Lucrece* with *Venus and Adonis*, heavily cut the originals, and converted them, according to Katherine Duncan-Jones's short review, into aggressive feminist tracts on the theme of "we hate men," which made *Lucrece* lose further its nuanced political dimension (Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen 2007, 81). Since feminist projects of transforming power relations are deeply implicated in the processes of speaking for and representing women, it is surprising that though Shakespeare's poem has benefited greatly from the emergence of feminist criticism, *The Rape of Lucrece* has not become a creative inspiration for women playwrights. This fact was noted by Germaine Greer, who stated that we have been waiting for centuries for a feminist/woman's creative response to Shakespeare's original (Greer 2002).

### Adapting Shakespeare's Poem for the Stage

Now Callie Kimball, a contemporary American playwright and actor, has answered Greer's call. In 2007, the first and so far only fully-fledged dramatic version of *The Rape of Lucrece* written by a woman was staged by the Washington Shakespeare Company in Washington, D.C. as part of the 2007 annual Shakespeare Festival (see Kimball 2007).<sup>10</sup> The play was commissioned as a last-minute replacement for a production of *King Lear* that was cancelled because of an actor's illness.

As Kimball reveals in our interview, she had three weeks to write her adaptation and produce the play, but the project did not overwhelm her since she usually feels "fairly confident in knowing what direction to go in when building a play, what to explore that will be stage-worthy." She said:

Since the Washington Shakespeare Company had a last-minute cancellation of a production of *King Lear*, the Artistic Director, Christopher Henley, called me and asked if I could adapt *Lucrece* for the stage as a replacement production. It was very meaningful to be a part of the Festival, so I wrote the first draft in three days, while we were having auditions, then I revised it over two more days, rehearsals began, and [the play] opened two weeks later. (Kimball 2009-2010)

This was not Kimball's first encounter with Shakespeare's texts: she had also adapted *The Comedy of Errors* into a fifteen-minute play for young people that she directed for the same theater company. Though Kimball had had experience working with long-form, formal verse before — she once wrote a two-hundred-odd line poem in ballad stanzas from the point of view of pre-Raphaelite subject Elizabeth Siddal — in the case of *The Rape of Lucrece*, the ultimate challenge was the creative transformation of narrative text into drama:

I think the main thing is to know that indeed, you are writing for a different medium, so it's a whole different set of rules. I felt no obligation to be faithful to the original text. I felt an obligation to try and build a worthwhile evening of theater for the audience, while doing *Lucrece* herself justice in trying to understand her decision without modernizing it in an anachronistic way. (Kimball 2009-2010)

In his review, Tim Treanor stressed that in her adaption, Kimball "contributed good sturdy Elizabethan prose" that complemented "the Shakespearean verse with vigorous and witty lines." She was also praised for her mastery of iambic pentameter, which "insinuate[d] internal rhyme to help the narrative flow" (Treanor 2007).

Another challenge was the poem's political dimension. Although she does not regard herself as a political writer, Kimball is interested, as she admits, in putting characters in personal or domestic situations that usually evoke political responses or consequences. "I love writing plays," she confessed enthusiastically, "that require the audience to question their own assumptions. I don't like to write political plays that tell people what to think" (Kimball 2009-2010). Yet as she maintained in "A Note from the Playwright" included in the program of the production, Kimball "was surprised to see that he [Shakespeare] did not place the rape in much of a historical, social, or political context — he limited the action to *Lucrece's* rape and suicide" (*Rape of Lucrece* 2007).

In her adaptation of *The Rape of Lucrece*, Kimball did not set out specifically to write a feminist response to the original. She was drawn, instead, to the idea of trying to bring to life theatrically this very real woman, Lucrece, in a way that would establish her in the context of her time and world and make her choice not just understandable, but even inevitable to a modern audience. Because this was an educational project, Kimball regarded the female dimension of her story as significant: "a lot of the sexism women face today is not so much organized and malicious as it is born out of ignorance". Furthering her argument on the gender problematics of Lucrece's story, Kimball stated: "Great social and political change often demands violence, and violence requires victims. Lucrece could have kept living, if she'd kept quiet. She chose to speak and to act for reasons that are slippery and elusive. Apparently, to her, the worst sort of violence would have been silence." Consequently, in her work Kimball tried to present female characters and their struggles in a new light because the questions of "why women are often complicit in their own subjection, and why some women will undermine other women" fascinated her (Kimball 2009-2010).

Working with Shakespeare's original, Kimball concentrated on passages that "struck her as very theatrical and dramaturgically engaging" (Kimball 2009-2010). Reading and re-reading *The Rape of Lucrece* helped her to establish relationships between characters, especially the ways "they worked on each other." It was not surprising that the original text dominated Scenes 4-6 of Kimball's play (dramatizing the rape and its aftermath), while in the other scenes Shakespeare's lines were used sparingly. Kimball's most significant innovation was the introduction of additional female characters. Besides Lucrece (Betsy Rosen), they were: Augusta and Maia, Lucrece's maids, Sabina (who was a ghostly representative of the Sabine women), and Sylvia, personifying the spirit of Rhea Silvia, the raped and murdered mother of Romulus and Remus. There were also two narrators, called Janus 1 and 2.

As indicated in the "Production History" of an unpublished text of the play, the work was commissioned on 12 January, while its world premiere took place on 9 February 2007. In her interview, Kimball commented on her choice of cast:

There were a handful of actors I inherited from the cancelled *King Lear*, and it was exciting to know who I was writing for. Knowing the actors who played the Januses meant I could see and hear them in my mind as I wrote their lines. They are both very beautiful, petite, and physical actors, and I knew they could bring to life this duality I was exploring. Janus 1, played by a man, personified the "God of Fate and Beginnings." As the more aggressive of the two gods, his character was "more yangy than yingy"; he was "the representative of the corrupt, selfish monarchy." Janus 2, played by a woman, was a "God of Doorways and Endings," who had "a slightly softer take on things" and was "a kinder, gentler Janus,

representing the New Republic." Augusta, Sabina, and Janus 1 were played by the same male actor (Denman C. Anderson), while Maia, Silvia, and Janus 2 were performed by the same woman (Abby Wood). The Januses did not fulfill the role of commentators on Tarquin's or Lucrece's psychological states; rather, they explicated the action (Prologue), illustrated the mood of the scene (Scene 2), described Lucrece's body, and by their actions and shouts, intensified the horror of rape (Scene 4). The other characters "saw" the action only once, when they were assisting Lucrece in narrating the rape to men: they not only narrated, but also reenacted physically the tragic event and incited the Romans to revenge. (Scene 6; Kimball 2009-2010)

Kimball's *The Rape of Lucrece* was divided into seven scenes, preceded by a Prologue in which all cast members appeared. The seventh scene exemplifies the play's structural principle; the seven actors who had opened the play now talked about the seven years that had passed since Lucrece's rape and the deposition of Tarquin, the seventh king of Rome. The seven actors, standing in a circle on set designer Lea Umberger's elegant flagstone flooring, delivered their lines to the sound of dripping bathwater, which created an acoustic effect that echoed the opening scene. The lines from the Prologue, "How shines the morning silver-melting dew / Against the rising splendor of the sun" (*Rape of Lucrece*, lines 24-25; Kimball n.d.),<sup>11</sup> which in Shakespeare's poem comment on the transitory nature of happiness, were repeated several times by various characters, linking the story to the lives of Silvia and Sabina, "the raped mothers of Rome." Additionally, the characters highlighted the connection between Lucrece as a symbol of violation and the imminent formation of the Roman republic. Another significant function of the Prologue was purely dramaturgical in that Kimball used it to show through postures and costumes how Augusta (a man) and Maia (a woman) would play themselves, then the Januses, and finally, Silvia and Sabina.

### Lucrece as Heroine and Victim

From a dramatic point of view, Scene 1 of Kimball's *Rape of Lucrece* was a masterpiece. The action moved between two settings, which simultaneously staged the world of war at Ardea and Lucrece's home and hearth in Rome to contrast deftly male and female values. The conversations at Tarquin's tent revealed the fraudulence of politics, male self-aggrandizing, and egoism. Tarquin (Colin Smith) and Collatinus (Theo Hadjimichael) engaged in a wrestling match, demonstrating their fascination with violence, physical prowess, and masculinity. Their exchange of comments about their wives document that women were at that time treated as the possessions of fathers and husbands who sanctioned and verified their honor. At the same time, with their small talk about

love, sexuality, men, and the role of chastity in female lives, Lucrece and her maids introduced the theme of domesticity. Since her devotion to the role of a patriarchal wife defined her virtue, Lucrece was regarded as chaste: that was part of being a proper wife, as was her occupation with a female job (spinning and sewing) late at night when her husband was away. The atmosphere of security and contentment was interrupted, however, in Lucrece's absence, by the stories told by Augusta and Maia about the suffering of

Silvia, mother of Rome, [who] in shame  
 And sorrow at her rape lived yet nine months  
 To be at long-last safely torn through pain  
 From mighty Romulus and Remus. (Kimball n.d.)

In Shakespeare's poem, Lucrece endures a confined solitude that was the lot of many high-born ladies in the Elizabethan period. Because her copious soliloquizing in the original would be unbearable in the theater, for most of the time in Kimball's adaptation Lucrece was surrounded by other women, her maids, with whom she talked freely about her emotions and psychological state of mind. Her close contact with Augusta and Maia turned her into an energetically modern woman who enjoyed physical freedom. At one point, Lucrece confessed that as a teenager, she had loved playing the harpasta; but because she had prioritized music over weaving, the high priest had found her "immodest" and unfit to be a vestal virgin (Scene 1).

In Kimball's play, by contrast, Lucrece was never bashful or awkward in her speech in company. Shakespeare's heroine shows pleasure silently — "with heaved-up hand" (*Rape of Lucrece*, line 111; Shakespeare 2007) — at Tarquin's report on her husband's military success, while in Kimball's adaptation she actively pressured Tarquin to tell her the news" about Collatine: "I cannot sit for fear of news. Pray hold / My hand and tell me how my husband fareth / Well or ill?" Learning that he was fine, Lucrece energetically proposed a toast: "Praise Jove. / Let us drink to his health" (Scene 4; Kimball n.d.). She was also bold enough to share with Tarquin the story of Collatine's courting, which Kimball modeled on Othello and Desdemona's story. When during his late night visit, Kimball's Tarquin told the women that his own mother, who in her youth had been an "excellent horsewoman," had to forsake this activity on her husband's orders, Lucrece undermined his conclusion of the story. Freely expressing, as she did many times, a strong emotional bond between women, she condemned the patriarchal custom that Roman, and unfortunately many modern, women had to follow, "choos[ing], suppress[ing], and chang[ing] / A natural loyalty of blood for the one of the bed."



In the rape scene (Scene 4), the Januses' eroticized descriptions of Lucrece's beauty, repeated twice, and their enactment of her physical molestation intensified Tarquin's sexual desire. Here, Kimball used Shakespeare's lines depicting Lucrece's stray strands of hair, which played with her breath in a dance that mingled innocence and sexuality, and the description of "her breasts," which "like ivory globes circled with blue" were "a pair of maiden worlds unconquered" (*Rape of Lucrece*, lines 6407-408, Shakespeare 2007). In a way, the Januses offered both the verbal and visual projection of Tarquin's mind, though Kimball's Tarquin was far from Shakespeare's character, who is haunted by the immorality of his planned abuse. Further, Kimball's Lucrece referred to Tarquin's social position only once: "Good prince, you do forget yourself" (Kimball n.d). she admonishes him, while in Shakespeare's poem Lucrece continually refers to Tarquin as both a prince and a king, insisting that heroic nobility should stem from self-control rather than from a quest for the unattainable. She even tries to divide Tarquin's baseness from his royalty, facetiously questioning whether Tarquin is really himself:

In Tarquin's likeness I did entertain thee.  
 Hast thou put on this shape to do him shame?  
 To all the host of heaven I complain me.  
 Thou wrong'st his honour, wound'st his princely name.  
 Thou art not what thou seem'd, and if the same,  
 Thou seem'st not what thou art, a god, a king;  
 For kings like gods should govern everything. (*Rape of Lucrece*, lines 596-603;  
 Shakespeare 2007)

Just before the rape, the Lucrece of Kimball was provided not only with a voice, but also with some physical energy, while in Shakespeare's original her speeches are imbued with patriarchal precepts, especially in their passivity: both versions reinforce her acceptance of the rightness of male power and the inevitability of female victimization (lines 683-84). In the theatrical version, however, Lucrece argued with the attacker by appealing to his reason, and at one point Tarquin had to chase her off the stage. In her stage directions, Kimball says: "I don't really care where they go as long as they are not seen clearly and the action of the rape is inscrutable" (Kimball n.d.).

Director Sarah Denhard staged Kimball's play in a round, empty space with just a few stage props (a table, bed, chairs, burning coal in a see-through cauldron, and veils), but made use of resourceful lighting, which not only played with colors and shadows but also illustrated and amplified the atmosphere of each scene. Just before the rape, Tarquin's gigantic shadow, cast upon the veils surrounding Lucrece's bed, made him look like a menacing spider, ready to catch its

innocent prey. At the moment of the rape, a kaleidoscopic play of sinister blue rays of light suddenly ceased, leaving the stage in total darkness, broken with the blaring sounds of struggle, desperate shouts, and cries. Next, a blinding white light illuminated both the stage and the audience, who saw clearly Lucrece's suffering reflected in her posture — she was lying curled up on an empty bed — while the disarrayed white veils, ripped from their mooring by Tarquin and scattered all over the stage, testified to the brutal violence inflicted on her body. Kimball recalled:

It was such a horrifying scene in the dark, and I didn't want to stare at people as the lights came up, but you could see that some people had been really frightened or disturbed [. . .] I think staging [the rape] in the dark meant they could imagine the scene more powerfully than anything we could have shown. Considering the rape statistics, there was a more than reasonable chance that at least one rape victim was in the audience each performance. (Kimball 2009-2010)

Although Shakespeare's narrator recounts the flow of Lucrece's thoughts rather than her physical actions, Kimball's heroine both expressed those thoughts through her behavior and commented on her changing states of mind. For example, the original Lucrece's conversation with her maid on the morning after the rape (*Rape of Lucrece*, lines 1219-95; Shakespeare 2007) alludes only to the urgent need to send a letter post-haste to her husband, and when Collatine returns home on the morning after the rape, he "finds his Lucrece clad in mourning black" (line 1585). In Kimball's adaptation (Scene 5), by contrast, the audience experienced Lucrece's trauma through both physical and verbal expression: as is typical for rape victims, the crying and sobbing Lucrece felt an urgent need to discard her disordered nightgown, bathe her soiled body, and dress in new, white clothes to symbolize her innocence.

And Lucrece was not alone in her distraught state. She did not confide to her maids the previous night's abuse, yet Augusta and Maia not only helped Lucrece to cleanse herself physically, but also reinforced her emotional solidarity with other raped women in Roman history. Delivering her nocturnal lamentation, Lucrece created a bond with her faithful maids and with her "legendary/Sisters, poor Silvia and Sabina". Augusta, who transformed herself into Sabina, and Maia, who assumed the role of Silvia, made reference to "Philomel / That sing'st ravishment." In this highly poignant scene, the women, located in both the past and present, promised to seek revenge upon Tarquin and, by extension, upon all the Tarquins in the world: "when life is shame," they proclaimed, we "need not fear" (Kimball n.d.).

While in the presence of all the Roman lords, Shakespeare's Lucrece identifies her assailant with stammering hesitancy, unable to speak his name — "He, he, fair lords, 'tis he" (*Rape of*

*Lucrece*, line 1721; Shakespeare 2007) — in Kimball's rendition, she seemed to be in complete verbal control of the situation. It was Lucrece who actively incited the "somewhat impassive" Brutus to revenge:

How may this forced stain be wiped hence?  
May my pure mind with this foul act dispense,  
My low declined honour to advance?  
May any terms acquit me from this chance? (Scene 5; Kimball n.d.)

Later in the play, when Lucretius, Collatine and Brutus, as seasoned politicians, delivered their political speeches to a gathered Roman crowd, Brutus repeated her words verbatim, without, however, crediting Lucrece for her rhetoric.

In Shakespeare's poem, the portrayal of Lucrece, who is completely disempowered by the rape, has its spectacular conclusion in the description of her suicide. Lucrece retains her "pure mind" (*Rape of Lucrece*, line 1704; Shakespeare 2007), but she also feels that her body is permanently stained. Consequently, despite the assurances of her husband and his lords that she is guiltless, she claims repeatedly that the attack has eternally sullied her body (lines 1656-59). In the play, the audience could *see* that Lucrece's body, like the bodies of many rape victims, was literally soiled and badly bruised. Here, Lucrece killed herself because the traumatic experience corrupted and destabilized her body and mind. At the end of Scene 5, she joined her wronged sisters, and they "arranged themselves in statuary formation" (Kimball n.d.).

Shakespeare not only glosses over some of the moral complexities of Lucrece's situation, but also emphasizes the moral deficiencies of her husband. Collatine's boast that his beautiful young wife's virtue exceeded that of the wives of all his fellow soldiers is introduced only in the Argument. Early in the poem, a rhetorical question is posed that indicates a definite disapproval of Collatine's boast: "Or why is Collatine the publisher / Of that rich jewel he should keep unknown / From thievish ears, because it is his own" (*Rape of Lucrece*, lines 33-35; Shakespeare 2007). The narrator goes on to say that Collatine's boast may have "suggested" the sexual assault to Tarquin (lines 36-37). Kimball, by contrast, makes the problem systemic by darkening the character of Lucrece's father. While Collatinus treats his wife as a bauble, he also is clearly enamored of her, and their relationship seems to be based more on partnership than on a typical patriarchal dependency. In Kimball's play, it is Lucrece's father Lucretius (Robert Lavery), rather than Collatine, who introduces Lucrece as "the finest prize [. . .] beyond compare" (Kimball n.d.), demonstrating an outmoded, patriarchal attitude toward women; Lucretius not only boasted of his daughter's chastity, but also admitted openly to beating his own wife.

### *Lucrece's Alternate Endings*

At the end of the play, when attended by Collatinus and Lucretius, Brutus (Parker Dixon) swore to a cheering crowd that he would avenge Lucrece's death by killing Tarquin, the female characters were pointedly absent. By reducing her to a symbol in history, the men used Lucrece as an excuse for a war, which was to be commemorated by a monument. The Epilogue, however, concluded the play by striking a chord that resonated with the now largely repressed feminine point of view. The Januses reminded the audience that Lucrece — who was still present on stage — was not "a poor stricken deer," but a strong woman whose

brave and selfless action did divide  
A brightened earth from sorrow-gloomed divine  
And so the deeds of fair Lucrece hath set  
Majestic Rome on greater glory yet. (Kimball n.d.)

The play thus concluded by making Lucrece and the other founding mothers who had been raped equal to Rome itself — the Rome that had been "cruelly wronged" and that would become immortalized as the Republic.

Though the play did not become the subject of longer critical evaluations, theater reviews appreciated Kimball and the Washington Shakespeare Company for their project, stressing the difficulty of adapting Shakespeare's lesser-read narrative text for a dramatic venture. The playwright was praised for "her ingenious appropriation of the most stirring lines from Shakespeare's poem, redistributing them among the characters" and "turning narration to speech and vice versa" (Wren 2007). While some reviewers concluded that the production was not "flawless," the general consensus was that it was a "bold and provocative enterprise" (*The Washington Post*, 14 February 2007).

When in the nineteenth century the great Russian poet Alexander Pushkin read Shakespeare's *Rape of Lucrece*, he wondered what would have happened if Lucrece, instead of killing herself, had simply slapped Tarquin's face? Pushkin's answer was that "if she had done that, the whole history of the world would have been changed" (quoted in O'Neill 2003, 139). Pushkin's callous comment represents one extreme of masculine response to Lucrece's plight, since he was both amused and indignant that what he considered to be a relatively trivial event had such a great impact on the history of the Western world.

Reading Shakespeare's poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, it is difficult to forget that it demonstrates a valuable insight into ethical issues as well as the possible motivations of the characters involved.

But Shakespeare's gendered perspective, although fascinating and compelling, is limited, while Callie Kimball's adaptation attempted to give voice to a feminine perspective on Lucrece's story. It pointedly drew attention to women's victimization by not only strangers, but also the men who dominate their lives at home. The play was indeed successful in showing women's solidarity in the face of their abuse throughout world history. By rejecting some elements of Shakespeare's fairly traditional story of an unfortunate woman, Kimball presented Lucrece as much more than a doe-like victim. Beyond the performance itself was the play's recognition that the themes of innocence, victimization, revenge, and war have relevance in current times, when women, empowered by their own perspective, can remember their own history and rather than giving up submissively, create support networks that allow them to come forward and speak against their attackers. As is always the case in adaptations of Shakespeare's works, the polyphonic structure of *The Rape of Lucrece* allowed Kimball to create a version of his poem that answered the needs of our times: it suggested women's growing immunity to men's attempts to subject them and objectify them not only in literary works, but also in culture, politics, and daily life. Callie Kimball's adaptation showed both the dramaturgical and dramatic potential of Shakespeare's poem and hopefully might inspire other adaptations in the future.

### Notes

1. I use the word "adaptation" here to designate all of the kinds of cultural appropriations that Ruby Cohn, in her classic book *Modern Shakespeare Offshoots*, has listed alphabetically (e.g., "abridgement," "appropriation," "emendation," "offshoot," "reduction," "spinoff," and "transformation"; Cohn 1976, 3-4).
2. Ian Donaldson says that Elizabethan interest in Shakespeare's poem was intensified by the popularity of Lucrece's story, recorded originally by Titus Livy in *Ab Urbe Condita* (Chapters 57-60) and by Ovid in *Fasti* (2:721-852). In the story/myth, which for centuries had been disseminated in various versions all over Europe, Lucrece or Lucretia was a watch-word for fifteenth and sixteenth-century Europe (Donaldson 1982, 19). Shakespeare initially published his version as *Lucrece*; the extended title *The Rape of Lucrece* first appeared in the "newly revised" quarto edition of 1616. It is impossible to say whether or not Shakespeare himself changed the title, since this was the year of his premature death.
3. Appropriations of the poem in Shakespeare's times show that *Lucrece* was not read only for pleasure, but also for education and life wisdom. For example, the poem was drawn upon heavily by *Englands Parnassus; or, The choices Flowers of our Modern Poets*, an anthology published in 1600. This dictionary of quotations, whose title-page proclaimed it to be both "pleasant and

profitable," is filled with admonitory examples for persons in private and public life. *Englands Parnassus* was so popular that it called for three re-editions in 1600, the year when the third and fourth editions of *Lucrece* were published. The compiler "R. A." ("Robert Allott") took it for granted that *Lucrece* contained political maxims of conduct (Allott 1600).

4. For a comprehensive analysis of Elizabethan and Jacobean appropriations of Lucrece's story, see Baines 2003, especially 101-234.
5. As the *World Shakespeare Bibliography* (online) indicates, dramatic readings of *The Rape of Lucrece* are especially appealing to audiences in Austria, Germany, Britain, the U.S., and France. A reading of selected scenes, as translated by Theresa Robinson, took place at the Theatre der Kreis, Vienna, 27 March, 1989 (Austria). The text of the whole poem was creatively interpreted by Marlene Achterman, who was the director at the the Oldenburgisches Staatstheatre, Oldenburg, 1996, and by Markus Fennert at the Bremer Shakespeare Company, Bremen, 1999 (Germany). In Britain, the AANDBC Theatre Company presented their theatrical reading of the poem at the Turtle Key Theatre, London (1995). *The Rape of Lucrece* was produced three times by The Royal Shakespeare Company. In 1966 at the Shakespeare Globe Theatre in Southwark, the Royal Shakespeare Company presented its reading versions of the story; in 2006, ten years later, Gregory Doran, who also adapted and edited with John Barton the poem's text, directed *The Rape of Lucrece's* reading by the RSC at the Swan Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon. In 2011, the poem was presented as a monodrama, performed by Camille O'Sullivan in the Swan Theatre. In 1990, the Shakespeare Society of America's Globe Playhouse in West Hollywood, Los Angeles produced the poem as a part of its three-and-one half-year project to stage all thirty-nine plays of the canon (Stodder 1992, 86-89). In December 1990-January 1991, Theresa Shiban, who was both the director and the adapter of the text, presented her dramaturgical reading of the poem at the Globe Playhouse, West Hollywood, USA (*Los Angeles Times*, 4 January 1991). Eight years later (February 1999), her revised production of the poem was staged by the Union Theatre at the London Fringe Festival. In 1992, Brian Bedford read the poem at the Chicago Associates of the Stratford Festival at Remains Theatre (Smith 1992, 16). In 2006, a theatrical version of the poem was staged in France. Its director, Marie-Louise Bischofberger, used a translation of the poem prepared especially for the event by Yves Bonnefoy. The play was produced by the MC93 Bibigney, the Theatre National du Luxembourg and the Theatre im Pfalzbau Ludwigshafen at the Oden-Theatre de l'Europe in Paris, where it was presented in summer (Rivière de Carles 2007, 122-26).
6. The connection between *The Rape of Lucrece* and modern warfare rapes of women was, however, noticed by Catherine Bennett, who quoted Lucrece's reaction after her rape by

Tarquin: "O opportunity, thy guilt is great / . . . Thou sets the wolf where he the lamb may get" to express her opinion on the systematic rape of women in Bosnia (Bennett 1993).

7. Though after its first translation in 1922 by Jan Kasprowicz, other Polish versions of *The Rape of Lucrece* have appeared, none has located the poem in the context of politics. See also the first Polish work devoted to Lucrece (Dyboski 1914).
8. For a detailed description of the play, see Smith 2000, 120-39. I would like to thank here the participants of the seminar "Womanhood Denies My Tongue: *Lucrece* Revisited," which Sheila Cavanagh and I were kindly invited to conduct by the SAA at its conference in 2008, for their inspiring work in the area, and for their invaluable responses to my own efforts. I am especially grateful to Nicholas Jones and Lauren McConnell for their essays, respectively, on Britten's and Obey's creative renditions of the poem in the context of World War II.
9. Benjamin Britten's opera *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946), with a libretto by Ronald Duncan, was based on Obey's play and first performed in 1945.
10. The citywide, six-month "Shakespeare in Washington Festival" also celebrated Shakespeare's 443rd birthday and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Folger Shakespeare Library Foundation. As indicated in the "Production History" in an unpublished text of the play, the work was commissioned on January 12, while its world premiere took place on February 9, 2007. I would like to thank here Ms. Callie Kimball, who generously answered my questions concerning her work on the play and shared with me the unpublished manuscript of the play's text; my quotations from Kimball's play come from this text. I am also grateful to Mr. Ray Gniewek, who granted me the right to use the production pictures and CD in my publication.
11. All quotations from Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* come from Katherine Duncan-Jones and H. R. Woudhuysen's edition (Shakespeare 2007).

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