

Petrarchism Demonised: Defiling chastity in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Titus Andronicus*

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ABSTRACT

In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare responds to the cult of Petrarchism in Elizabethan England, exploring the darker reaches of Petrarchan devotion by way of creating demonic incarnations of the Petrarchan lover whose idealisation of their mistresses takes an extreme, sexual form, catalysing intimately invasive action such as rape or attempted rape. Through an attentive reading of the Petrarchan topoi used by the characters in these texts, this article argues that Shakespeare endeavoured to criticise the idealising force of Petrarchism by revealing its violent potential.

On the 6th of April 1327, in the Church of Saint Clare in Avignon, Francesco Petrarca purportedly saw Laura for the first time: a meeting which catalysed his *Canzoniere*, a collection of 366 sonnets and songs, dedicated to a woman he would love unrequitedly for the rest of his life. Stephen Minta notes that Petrarch produced in his *Canzoniere*, published posthumously in 1470, the “first unified collection of love lyrics in a modern European vernacular”, which inspired the spread of the Petrarchan sonnet throughout western Europe.¹ Petrarch’s sonnets became the mark of wit in the centuries to follow because, despite the fact that they were originally the product of deep emotion on Petrarch’s part, they could be reproduced fairly mechanically as if by a simple formula.² In other words, Petrarch developed a flexible poetic language that was easily imitable. Ernest Wilkins defines Renaissance Petrarchism as “the writing of lyric verse under the direct or indirect influence of Petrarch in a period beginning in his lifetime and ending about 1600”, and manifests itself in the use of “Petrarchan words, phrases, lines, metaphors, conceits, and ideas, and the adoption, for poetic purposes, of the typical Petrarchan experiences and attitudes”.³ In 1591, following the publication of Sir Philip Sidney’s sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*, Renaissance Petrarchism in the vogue of sonnet-writing was established in Elizabethan England; Shakespeare indubitably came into contact with this, and his work experiments with it across genres – sonnets, narrative poetry and drama.

1 Stephen Minta, *Petrarch and Petrarchism: The English and French Traditions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), p.2.

2 Leonard Forster, *The Icy Fire: Five Studies in European Petrarchism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p.5.

3 Ernest Wilkins, “A General Survey of Renaissance Petrarchism”, *Comparative Literature* 2.4 (Autumn: 1950): 328–29.

I wish to focus, particularly, on Shakespeare's Petrarchan lovers who are not confined to sonnets but embodied in his comedy *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1590–1591), his narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) and his tragedy *Titus Andronicus* (1592). My central argument is that Shakespeare uses these texts to depict and consider the dangers of Petrarchan idealisation when the desire its rhetoric provokes and justifies is not limited to the poetic landscape but enacted within a narrative. In each case, the would-be lover's own lasciviousness acts as a catalytic force, resulting in rape or attempted rape, which is, in fact, a betrayal and demonising of the spiritual aspect of Petrarchan love. As Sara Morrison and Deborah Uman have noted, "few critics have explored what David Schalkwyk refers to as the 'necessary embodiment' of the poetic voice that results in important differences between a sonnet and a dramatised sonneteer"; hence, in Morrison and Uman's *Staging the Blazon in Early Modern English Theatre* (2013), the dramatic potential of Petrarchan topoi is considered in a sustained and comprehensive manner.⁴ However, what this text excludes, and necessarily so, is an extended investigation into one writer's exploration of the embodied Petrarchan lover. I will therefore endeavour to contribute to this critical tradition by focusing on one writer's – that is, Shakespeare's – engagement with an enacted Petrarchism at varying and increasing levels of intensity. I begin with *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1590–1591), in which the idea of rape as a response to the literalising of Petrarchan topoi is explicitly introduced but not developed; this is followed by an analysis of Tarquin and Lucrece's relationship in *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), the core text of the discussion, in which the Petrarchan blazon initiates and justifies the fragmentation of both 'lover' and 'beloved'. The article concludes with a brief reference to *Titus Andronicus* (1592), which, with "one of the most horrific rape scenes in English drama", explores the most destructive consequences of the "impulse of Petrarchan poetry to dismember the beloved's body".⁵

The idea of rape or attempted rape in response to sexual idealisation on the part of a Petrarchan lover, and rooted in the violent potential of Petrarchan conceits, is introduced at the end of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (which appears to be Shakespeare's first experiment in this regard). Proteus, in developing an unrequited love for Silvia, his friend Valentine's beloved, reveals himself as a Petrarchan lover when he uses prominent Petrarchan motifs, such as metaphorical description and heavenly association, to describe Silvia as "a celestial sun" (2.6.10) and as one whom "heaven ... made ... fair" (2.6.25).⁶ The fact that his love is most certainly Petrarchan in its unrequited nature is made explicit when he says: "Yet, spaniel-like, the more she spurns my love,/ The more it grows and fawneth on her still" (4.2.14–15). In response to Proteus's consistent supplications, Silvia says: "I am so far from granting thy request/That I despise thee for thy wrongful suit" (4.2.98–99). In Act Five, Proteus's unrequited and frustrated desire for Silvia erupts into the physical realm, revealing the violent potential of Petrarchan rhetoric when Proteus exploits the typically Petrarchan love-as-war allegory to justify his actions before he attempts to rape Silvia:

Nay, if the gentle spirit of moving words
Can no way change you to a milder form,
I'll woo you like a soldier, at arms' end,
And love you 'gainst the nature of love – force ye.
(5.4.55–58)

However, the comic structure does not allow for a tragic conclusion to take place, and Valentine thus finds Proteus before he can achieve his aim. Other genres were required for Shakespeare to explore the idea more fully: initially in the tragedy of *Titus Andronicus* (1592) and then in the narrative poetry he turned to during the theatre closures of 1594. *The Rape of Lucrece*, with its clear emphasis on the Petrarchan blazon, the destructively desiring Petrarchan lover and the simultaneous fragmentation of

4 Sara Morrison and Deborah Uman (eds), *Staging the Blazon in Early Modern English Theatre* [2013] (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p.4.

5 Valerie Wayne, *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p.130 and Morrison and Uman, *Staging the Blazon*, p.3.

6 All references to *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* are taken from the Arden Third Series edition, ed. W.C. Carroll (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

Tarquin and Lucrece in the act of rape as the climax of a Petrarchism which is not limited to the poetic landscape, is the focus of the following discussion.

Shakespeare's reimagining of the infamous rape of Lucretia, the chaste wife of Collatine, by Tarquin, resulting in her suicide and, consequently, the expulsion of the kings from Rome, has as its principal source "Ovid's poem on Roman festivals, the *Fasti*" but is also based on "two prose histories of Rome, Shakespeare's second major source, Livy's *Ab urbe condita*, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Roman Antiquities*".⁷ Lucretia's story has been "subjected to varieties of interpretation from the earliest period of Roman historiography", producing a number of different versions which "[differ] slightly in detail, as well as in [their] ethical and political attitudes to the central character".⁸ In fact, the ethical and political implications of the decisions of both Tarquin and Lucrece have been the focus of most of the criticism on *The Rape of Lucrece*, despite Jonathan Bate's assertion that the poem is "more interested in desire than in politics".⁹

From the outset, Tarquin is characterised in terms of his desire, which is "false" and has "trustless wings" (l.2).¹⁰ His desire has affected him to the extent that it constitutes the air he inhales and exhales as a "[I]ust-breathèd" (l.3) "proto-tyrant".¹¹ The narrator then compares Tarquin's lust to the "lightless fire" (l.4) of hell. In this way, the narrator "implies several things about the nature of [Tarquin's] desire: its treachery ... its possession of Tarquin ... its sinister, even demonic energy ... its violence".¹² What is significant about this desire is that it is experienced for a woman "depicted to [Tarquin] by her husband, [Collatine], in a way that anachronistically celebrates her as a type of Petrarchan lady", making Tarquin – as her pursuer – a version of the Petrarchan lover. As the narrator notes, Collatine "unwisely did not let/To praise the clear unmatched red and white,/Which triumph'd in that sky of his delight" (ll.10–12). The Petrarchan lady's beauty had been codified from the fifteenth century in Italy, and one of its chief characteristics was the amalgamation of red and white in her cheeks, identifying Lucrece as the "embodiment of perfect beauty".¹³ The narrator concurs with Collatine's assessment by using a typically Petrarchan topos, describing Lucrece's eyes as "mortal stars as bright as heaven's beauties" (l.13), confirming Lucrece's role, in A.D. Cousins's words, as the "Petrarchan object of desire". Cousins expands usefully on this key point:

So Tarquin, the ... tyrant figure tyrannised by desire for a woman delineated to him virtually prefiguring Laura, becomes in relation to her a counterpart to the Petrarchan lover ... But the differences between Tarquin and, say, Petrarch's speaker in 'Passa la nave mia colma d'oblio' are more important than the similarities. In particular, the latter's desire for his lady seems ambiguous, alternating between the erotic and the spiritual. Tarquin's desire for Lucrece is, however, solely unspiritual, a 'lightless fire' (l.4) concerned only with the body and violation: 'lurk[ing] to aspire,/ And girdle with embracing flames the waist/ Of Collatine's fair love, Lucrece the chaste' (ll.5–7). Expressing his will to tyranny, his proto-tyrannic role, Tarquin's desire makes him a brutal parody of the Petrarchan lover as a species and his pursuit of Lucrece a sexual heightening or violation of the Petrarchan discourse of love.¹⁴

This is an apt and useful recognition of the Petrarchan undertones in *The Rape of Lucrece* which are being explored at greater length in the present article – although it must be emphasised that my approach does not take Cousins's view of Tarquin as a Petrarchan *parody*, but views him wholly seriously, as a

7 Joshua Scodel, "Shame, Love, Fear, and Pride in *The Rape of Lucrece*", in J.F.S. Post (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare's Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.413.

8 Colin Burrow, Introduction to *The Complete Sonnets and Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.45.

9 Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.73.

10 All references to *The Rape of Lucrece* are taken from *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow.

11 A.D. Cousins, "Subjectivity, Exemplarity, and the Establishing of Characterisation in *Lucrece*", *Studies in English Literature* 38.1 (Winter 1998): 48.

12 *Ibid.*: 47.

13 *Ibid.*: 52.

14 *Ibid.*: 48.

violently intensified and active incarnation of the Petrarchan lover, freed from the confines of the sonnet. Nonetheless, it is important to note that it is Collatine who, in acting as a catalyst for this Petrarchan reaction through his public idealisation of his wife, in fact points to the provocative power of Petrarchan rhetoric. Katharine Eisaman Maus argues that the tragedy “issues originally from the fatal rashness of Collatine, a male Pandora, who ‘[u]nlocked the treasure of his happy state’ (l.16) to his kinsman Tarquin, displaying ‘that rich jewel he should keep unknown’ (l.34)”, implying that “Lucrece, like Pandora’s treasure, needs to be kept in a box”.¹⁵ This serves to identify Lucrece, from the outset of the poem, as an object that can be possessed, and an icon to be worshipped. Significantly, in *Cymbeline*, it is also Posthumus’s public idealisation of his wife Innogen that acts as a catalyst for the wager plot, the subsequent slandering of Innogen, and Posthumus’s destructive despair.

Therefore, Tarquin – as a lustful Petrarchan pursuer – leaves “the Roman host” (l.3) at the “besieged Ardea” (l.1) to “quench the coal which in his liver glows” (l.47) in response to the desire awoken in him by Collatine’s Petrarchan blazon. His desire is associated with treachery, impulsivity and regret when it is described as a “rash false heat” (l.48) that will ultimately be “wrapped in repentant cold” (l.48). Furthermore, Tarquin is once more aligned with falsity when the narrator describes him as “this false lord” (l.50) who arrives at Collatium, while Lucrece is identified as the ultimate Petrarchan lady “[w]ithin whose face beauty and virtue [strive]/Which of them should underprop her fame” (ll.52–53), physical and moral perfection being the chief characteristics of the Petrarchan beloved. Lucrece and Tarquin’s contrasting roles are further highlighted when the narrator refers to Lucrece as an “earthly saint adorèd by [a] devil” (l.85). Burrow’s gloss of “adorèd” is “worshipped as a deity (with a suggestion of idolatry)” – which serves to highlight Tarquin’s role as an idealising and demonic incarnation of the Petrarchan lover.¹⁶

Emphasis is then placed on the power and insufficiency of viewing the beloved as an object when the “wonder of [Tarquin’s] eye” (l.95) is referred to as well as its inability to be satisfied: “But, poorly rich, so wanteth in his store/That, cloyed with much, he pineth still for more” (ll.97–98). Hence, Tarquin indicates that his lust for Lucrece as the representation of beauty is unquenchable, which points to the possibility of there being an eruption of desire in the physical realm, drawing attention to the dangers inherent in the frustration of longing triggered by Petrarchism. Furthermore, Tarquin is a “doting” (l.155) lover who has to “[pawn] his honour to obtain his lust” (l.156); in other words, it is implied that succumbing to lust involves sacrifice – loss – whose nature is *selfish* rather than *selfless*. In fact, the narrator returns to the idea that desire is treacherous, questioning whether Tarquin will ever trust another when “he himself himself confounds, betrays/To sland’rous tongues and wretched hateful days” (ll.160–161). Thus, before Tarquin yields to his desire, the audience is alerted to the fact that his rape of Lucrece will be as much a betrayal of himself as it is of her. Crucially, Tarquin is as aware as the audience of the self-destructive nature of his lust for Lucrece, which is made evident when he is described as the “lustful lord” (l.169) who is “madly tossed between desire and dread” (l.171):

Th’ one sweetly flatters, th’ other feareth harm;
But honest fear, bewitched with lust’s foul charm,
Doth too too oft betake him to retire,
Beaten away by brainsick rude desire.

(ll.172–175)

The diction in this extract is particularly effective in conveying the idea that desire is a demonic essence that “bewitch[es]” and possesses Tarquin through the magic of its “foul charm”. It is further described as a “brainsick” and “rude” force that “beat[s] away” “fear”, the plosive “b” alliteration serving to emphasise the strength of its attack. Significantly, the self-destructiveness triggered by Tarquin’s desire is, in fact, part of the Petrarchan mode. While this tendency to masochism is identified by Cynthia Marshall as the “structural outcome of the representation of desire through language”, critical perception

15 Katharine Eisaman Maus, “Taking Tropes Seriously: Language and Violence in Shakespeare’s *Rape of Lucrece*”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37.1 (Spring 1986): 71.

16 Burrow, Notes, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, p.248.

of the Petrarchan lover's depiction of his fragmentation varies.¹⁷ On the one hand, for John Freccero, Nancy Vickers, Lisa S. Starks-Estes and others, Petrarchan poetry is seen "not as a simple outpouring of emotion but as an artful presentation, carefully contrived with an eye to audience and effect. The portrayal of self as in pieces or overpowered is not the subjective reflection of the poet's state of mind but the product of cool authorial judgement."¹⁸ In other words, the lover conquers his narrative of fracture by capturing and mastering its reflection in the form of his poetry. In addition, according to this view, the Petrarchan blazon is the poet's means to overcoming his own fragmentation by objectifying and deconstructing the body of his beloved, so as to achieve an illusion of a stable self. On the other hand, however, for critics such as Catherine Bates, Lynn Enterline, Marguerite Waller, and Giuseppe Mazzotta, "fragmentation [in the Petrarchan lyric] is not seen as something that the poet projects onto women with a view to stabilising the masculine writing subject but, rather, as something that serves to query that supposedly 'stable subject' itself", as rooted in Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, which Bates refers to as "the product of a self-divided and self-alienated subject, of a self internally split and so eternally in crisis".¹⁹ The blazon of the beloved, then, according to this perspective, is an extension of the shattering of the poet's selfhood, in what Marshall calls a "perversely attempted mutuality".²⁰ In this way, the Petrarchan lyric becomes a poetry of fracture which "replicates and prolongs the undoing of the ego or self ... through images of bodies in states of undoing", so that neither the lover nor the beloved achieves a stable, unitary selfhood (this is the view with which the present article is aligned).²¹

Consequently, in *The Rape of Lucrece*, Tarquin's self-division as the Petrarchan lover is further revealed while he is walking towards Lucrece's chamber:

Here, pale with fear, he doth premeditate
 The dangers of his loathsome enterprise,
 And in his inward mind he doth debate
 What following sorrow may on this arise.
 Then, looking scornfully, he doth despise
 His naked armour of still-slaughtered lust,
 And justly thus controls his thoughts unjust:

 'Fair torch, burn out thy light, and lend it not
 To darken her whose light excelleth thine;
 And die, unhallowed thoughts, before you blot
 With your uncleanness that which is divine.
 Offer pure incense to so pure a shrine.
 Let fair humanity abhor the deed
 That spots and stains love's modest snow-white weed.'

(ll.183–196)

This extract exposes Tarquin's conscience, revealing that his is indeed a character divided; he is not composed solely of lust even though he may be dominated by it. In fact, he attempts to prevent himself from raping Lucrece by reminding himself of Lucrece's purity in relation to the violently invasive deed that would corrupt and stain her modesty. Tarquin also realises that this "vile" and "base" (l.202) deed, rooted in a demonically Petrarchan "dot[ing]" (l.207), will bring "shame" (l.197) and "foul dishonour" (l.198) on himself and his family, once more highlighting the losses he will suffer as a consequence of his deeds. Furthermore, Tarquin considers what he will ultimately gain if he rapes Lucrece:

17 Cynthia Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity, and Early Modern Texts* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p.59.

18 Catherine Bates, *Masculinity, Gender and Identity in the English Renaissance Lyric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.7.

19 Bates, *Ibid.*, p.95 and "Desire, Discontent, Parody: The Love Sonnet in Early Modern England", in A.D. Cousins and Peter Howarth (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.114.

20 Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self*, p.59.

21 *Ibid.*, p.74.

What win I if I gain the thing I seek?
 A dream, a breath, a froth of fleeting joy.
 Who buys a minute's mirth to wail a week,
 Or sells eternity to get a toy?

(ll.211–214)

Tarquin knows that sexual fulfilment is but a moment's bliss in comparison to the lifetime of regret and guilt he will suffer if he engages in the deed. This argument appears to anticipate Sonnet 129 of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* in which lust is attacked for being "perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,/ Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust" (ll.3–4). According to the speaker, anticipated pleasure compels men to pursue "lust in action" (l.2) without any regard for "reason" (l.6), but it is "despised" (l.5) and "hated" (l.7) as soon as sexual intercourse has taken place. Nevertheless, in *The Rape of Lucrece*, despite Tarquin's internal debate between "frozen conscience and hot burning will" (l.247), he states that his will – his passion – is "strong past reason's weak removing" (l.243), indicating to the audience that he is weakening in the clutches of his desire. This tension between reason and passion, ice and fire, is a predominant concern of Petrarch's in his *Canzoniere*, which, in turn, has led to Petrarchan discourse's acknowledgement of "reason's incapacity to govern desire".²² While Petrarch's passion is never acted on in the *Canzoniere*, for Katharine Eisaman Maus, Tarquin's debate with his conscience shows that Petrarchan discourse can be used to "legitimise one's denial of constraint by reason", pointing once more to the "violent possibilities" inherent in Petrarchan rhetoric, especially within the narrative sphere.²³ Lisa S. Starks-Estes agrees that through "his narrator's treatment of this internal debate, Shakespeare shows how rhetorical figures of Petrarchan poetry shape, control and determine Tarquin's self-reasoning".²⁴ Indeed, there is a "Petrarchan finale, as it were, to Tarquin's soliloquy – and appropriately so".²⁵ He concludes his soliloquy with the following reworking of the Petrarchan "love-as-perilous-sea-voyage allegory", confirming how thoroughly "Petrarchan [a] lover Tarquin is": "Desire my pilot is, beauty my prize:/ Then who fears sinking where such treasure lies?" (ll.279–280)²⁶

Once Tarquin, as a fractured Petrarchan lover, reaches Lucrece's bed chamber, he gazes upon her and the narrative is occupied with a description of the sleeping Lucrece – a typically Petrarchan blazon which, while "dominated by the male gaze", as Nancy Vickers asserts, serves to extend Tarquin's internal fragmentation to an image of Lucrece in a "[state] of undoing".²⁷ Lucrece is described using the following Petrarchan topoi: she is a "fair and fiery-pointed sun" (l. 372); her "lily hand" lies below her "rosy cheek" (l.386); she lies like a "virtuous monument" (l.392); her hair is like "golden threads" (l.400); her breasts are like "ivory globes circled with blue" (l.407); her skin is "alabaster" (l.419), her lips "coral" (l.420) and her dimpled chin "snow-white" (l.420). Significantly, Lucrece's humanity is diminished by this description. Tarquin reads her "as though she is simply a material thing" – a work of art that can and ought to be possessed.²⁸ The narrator indicates that it is precisely the "gazing" (l.424) through the Petrarchan lens upon the beloved – the blazon – that qualifies Tarquin's "rage of lust" (l.424), yet again pointing to the possibility and dangers of the enactment of Petrarchan rhetoric in a physical realm. In fact, Tarquin informs Lucrece that it is her beauty – her external form – that "ensnared [her] to this night" (l.485). Marion Wells asserts that "the blazon reflects a fetishisation of the body on the part of the viewer; Lucrece is never more absent to Tarquin as a living presence than when he gazes on her", and it is this "simultaneous absorption and alienation the narrator's blazon conveys".²⁹ Wells continues:

22 Cousins, "Subjectivity, Exemplarity": 57.

23 Maus, "Taking Tropes Seriously": 77.

24 Lisa S. Starks-Estes, *Violence, Trauma, and Virtus in Shakespeare's Roman Poems and Plays: Transforming Ovid* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.120.

25 Cousins: 56.

26 *Ibid.*: 57.

27 Nancy Vickers, "The Blazon of Sweet Beauty's Best", in Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* (New York, NY: Methuen, 1985), p.95 and Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self*, p.74.

28 Burrow, Introduction, p.63

29 Marion Wells, "'To Find a Face Where all Distress is Stell'd': *Enargeia*, *Ekphrasis*, and Mourning in *The Rape of Lucrece* and the *Aeneid*", *Comparative Literature* 54.2 (Spring 2002): 108.

“The narrator’s lingering blazon ... eroticises Lucrece’s body in such a way as to keep Tarquin’s attention permanently at its surface.” While this literalises, taking to the physical extreme, the argument of critics such as Vickers that “Petrarchism is characterised by an objectification and fragmentation of women’s bodies which both silences the beloved and affirms the male poet’s authorial power”, the extension of Vickers’s argument by critics such as Bates, Enterline, Waller and Mattozza should also be considered in understanding that the blazon is as much a reflection of the lover’s deconstruction as it is of the beloved’s.³⁰

When it is least expected, however, Lucrece is not at all silent; she – as the victim – has a voice, which is an element that Shakespeare adds to his classical sources. Joshua Scodel notes that the “next major surprise after Tarquin’s self-debate is Lucrece’s long and forceful verbal resistance to Tarquin’s threats”, as in “both Livy and Ovid, only Tarquin speaks during the rape scene; Livy’s Tarquin commands Lucretia’s silence, while Ovid describes her as mute with fear”.³¹ Shakespeare’s Lucrece is “astonishingly, unstoppably, all-but endlessly eloquent” in urging Tarquin not to rape her, and as Colin Burrow observes, what makes Shakespeare’s Lucrece particularly radical is the fact that she does so “using a vocabulary which is distinctively male, and for readers in 1594, distinctively political”.³² Thus, she takes on a masculine role, voice and power:

This deed will only make thee loved for fear,
But happy monarchs still are feared for love.
With foul offenders thou perforce must bear,
When they in thee the like offences prove.
If but for fear of this, thy will remove.
For princes are the glass, the school, the book,
Where subjects’ eyes do learn, do read, do look.
And wilt thou be the school where lust shall learn?
Must he in thee read lectures of such shame?
Wilt thou be glass wherein it shall discern
Authority for sin, warrant for blame
To privilege dishonour in thy name?
Thou back’st reproach against long-living laud,
And mak’st fair reputation but a bawd.

(ll.610–623)

In this extract, Lucrece speaks in what Burrow calls “the voice of a Renaissance royal counsellor, and echoes Cicero’s injunction that it is better to be loved than feared”:

The advice which Lucrece gives to Tarquin here is a textbook example of political oratory in this period ... Early readers of the poem would have heard behind the voice of Lucrece at this point that of ... any one of a dozen contributors to the genre of Humanist prince-books. Her words would have won an easy nod of assent from early readers, who would instinctively feel that princes *should* seek to be feared through love, and *should* provide exemplary government.³³

However, Tarquin refuses to hear and be counselled by Lucrece: “His ear her prayers admits, but his heart granteth/No penetrable entrance to her plaining” (ll.558–559). Subsequently, he instructs her to be silent by saying: “No more ... By heaven, I will not hear thee” (l.667). Hence, the forms of counsel which should be successful in preventing a ruler from succumbing to tyrannical impulses are ineffective in this poem. Instead, they become “the words of a woman who is about to be raped”, showing that even when Lucrece *is given* a voice and a masculine role, it is still the man – the Petrarchan pursuer – who

30 See Kim F. Hall, “Beauty and the Beast of Whiteness: Teaching Race and Gender”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 47.4 (Winter 1996): 466.

31 Scodel, “Shame, Love”, pp.417–18.

32 Burrow, Introduction, pp.50–51.

33 *Ibid.*, p.52.

determines whether or not she will be heard and acknowledged, which suggests that a woman can be as disempowered when her voice is present as when it is absent.³⁴ Thus, Lucrece's rape presents the audience with the consequences of a Petrarchism that does not consider the voice, role or presence of the beloved. Tarquin succumbs to his desire and rapes Lucrece, silencing her "piteous clamours in her head" (l.681) with the "nightly linen that she wears" (l.680). As A. Robin Bowers argues, Lucrece's cries are "stifled in the silence of the narrative, just as Tarquin [stifles] them; so in cohesion of form and content, Shakespeare again emphasises the forced silence of Lucrece".³⁵

Yet, it is not only Lucrece who suffers the consequences of her rape. She is indeed robbed of "a dearer thing than life" (l.687) for her time – her chastity and honour – but Tarquin, too, is "far poorer than before" (l.693), revealing the Petrarchan relationship as fundamentally "somasochistic" (Marshall's term). In fact, before Lucrece is given the opportunity in the narrative to voice her suffering after the rape, Tarquin, whose "soul's fair temple is defacèd" (l.719), is the main focus of the narrative; he is a "captive victor who hath lost in gain,/ Bearing away the wound that nothing healeth" (ll.730–731). Burrow notes that the attempt at the "violation of the domestic sphere rebounds on the rapist", making readers "do a double-take [as] it is Tarquin's soul, rather than that of Lucrece, which is exposed to a siege and is ravished".³⁶ Therefore, as a "frighteningly literal enactment of the quest for possession of the image adumbrated in Petrarch's gentler lyric," the rape, writes Wells, "reveals the [climax] of this request as a violent mutual defacement".³⁷ The effect of this is not to diminish the suffering of Lucrece, but rather to indicate that there is more than one victim of this Petrarchan outburst. Lucrece will bear "the load of lust [Tarquin] left behind,/ And he the burden of a guilty mind" (ll.734–35). Lucrece is disempowered by Tarquin – and he is disempowered by his desire, which serves to challenge theories of "a phallic, masterly masculinity" in the Renaissance lyric by revealing an alternative masculinity which is "not masterly but mastered ... masochistic, perverse, and not always on the ascent, but orientated, rather, in a perpetually downward direction".³⁸

The Rape of Lucrece thus presents the audience with a narrative in which the dangers of idealisation are not limited to the lover's poetic description of his beloved, but erupt in the physical realm by inciting invasively intimate and destructive action on the part of the Petrarchan lover, shattering the selfhood of both beloved and lover. If, however, this entailed Shakespeare seeming to "rehabilitate the conventional language of desire by unleashing its violent potential" using narrative poetry, he had already dramatised this violent potential in its ultimate and most terrifyingly impersonal form in his first tragedy, *Titus Andronicus* (1592).³⁹ Titus Andronicus's daughter Lavinia, "Rome's rich ornament" (1.1.52), the "idealised feminine beauty possessed by a patriarchal Rome", is brutally raped by Tamora's sons, Demetrius and Chiron, who identify their "passions" (2.1.36) for Lavinia in Act Two, aligning themselves with the sexually idealising aspect of Petrarchan love.⁴⁰ Chiron and Demetrius compete with each other over their "love" (74) for Lavinia but, like Lucrece, she is married and cannot, and does not, return their 'love'. Chiron portrays himself as a typical Petrarchan lover in that he wants to "serve" (34) Lavinia and professes that he would propose a "thousand deaths/ ... to achieve her whom [he] love[s]" (82–83), the desire for servitude and death imagery being prominent Petrarchan motifs. Consequently, Demetrius also identifies himself as a pursuing Petrarchan lover when he uses a hunting metaphor to tell Aaron how he will "achieve" (84) Lavinia: "What, hast not thou full often struck a doe/ And borne her cleanly by the keeper's nose?" (97–98). Starks-Estes notes:

Petrarch ... appropriated the mythological framework (Apollo and Daphne; Diana and Actaeon) and the dominant themes, conceits, or metaphors, such as the hunt, from Ovid's

34 *Ibid.*, p.53.

35 A. Robin Bowers, "Iconography and Rhetoric in Shakespeare's *Lucrece*", *Shakespeare Studies* 14 (1981): 13.

36 Burrow, p.57.

37 Wells, "To Find a Face": 109.

38 Bates, *Masculinity, Gender*, p.1 and p.14.

39 Maus: 77.

40 Wayne, *The Matter of Difference*, p.132. All references to *Titus Andronicus* are taken from the Oxford Shakespeare *Complete Works* (2nd edition), ed. John Jowett, William Montgomery, Gary Taylor and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Clarendon, 2005).

Metamorphoses. The violence is literal in the myths of Ovid, in contrast to later Petrarchan verse, where it is couched in poetic conceits. Petrarch inherited these metaphors, settings, and themes from Ovid. In Petrarch, however, the hunt is an extended metaphor for desire ... This connection between Petrarch's sonnets and Ovid's poetry would have been obvious to the Elizabethans, whose Ovidian narrative poems were published in the same collections as their sonnets.⁴¹

The hunting metaphor is prominent in other Elizabethan sonnets as a way of depicting the Petrarchan lover's attempts to court his beloved. For example, in Sonnet 67 of Spenser's *Amoretti*, the speaker uses the hunting metaphor to describe his pursuit of his beloved:

Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace,
 Seeing the game from his escapt away,
 Sits downe to rest him in some shady place,
 With panting hounds beguiled of their pray;
 So after long pursuit and vaine assay,
 When I all weary had the chace forsooke,
 The gentle deare returnd the selfe-same way,
 Thinking to quench her thirst at the next brooke.
 (ll.1–8)⁴²

The difference between the sonnets and *Titus Andronicus*, however, is in the literalising of the metaphor – the “impulse of Petrarchan love poetry to dismember the beloved's body”.⁴³ Aaron initially interrupts Demetrius and Chiron's Petrarchan rhetoric by pointing out the implausibility of Lavinia's compliance with their demands by comparing her chastity to that of Lucrece: “Take this of me: Lucrece was not more chaste/Than this Lavinia, Bassianus' love” (2.1.115–16). This is a crucial parallel to draw in that it is precisely this chastity and embodiment of the ideal that provokes the Petrarchan pursuers in both *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Titus Andronicus*, and it is this realisation that prompts Aaron to suggest the literalising of Demetrius and Chiron's hunting metaphors so as to enable them to satisfy their lust for Lavinia:

My lords, a solemn hunting is in hand;
 There will the lovely Roman ladies troop.
 The forest walks are wide and spacious,
 And many unfrequented plots there are,
 Fitted by kind for rape and villainy.
 Single you thither then this dainty doe,
 And strike her home by force, if not by words.
 ...
 There serve your lust, shadowed from heaven's eye,
 And revel in Lavinia's treasury.
 (2.1.119–125; 138–39)

Demetrius and Chiron are thus repeatedly associated with the sexualising aspect of Petrarchan idealisation. In addition, it should be noted that Aaron's suggestion to “strike [Lavinia] home by force, if not by words” closely resembles Proteus's words to Silvia before he attempts to rape her in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (5.4.55–58, quoted earlier). Hence, in dramatising the Petrarchan lover's pursuit of his beloved, both plays emphasise the movement from the abstract realm of Petrarchan rhetoric into a physical realm in which the Petrarchan beloved can be actively *forced* into fulfilling the lover's sexual fantasies.

41 Lisa S. Starks-Estes, “Transforming Ovid: Images of Violence, Vulnerability, and Sexuality in Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*”, in Morrison and Uman (eds), *Staging the Blazon*, p.54.

42 Taken from Maurice Evans, *Elizabethan Sonnets* (London: Dent, 1977).

43 Morrison and Uman, p.3.

After being encouraged by their mother, Tamora, to “use [Lavinia] as [they] will” (2.3.166), Chiron and Demetrius indeed attack Lavinia in a forest as prey, and consequently rape and silence her through mutilation. They cut out her tongue, invoking the myth of Philomela and Tereus, and amputate her hands, so that Lavinia becomes, as Maus calls her, “an amalgam [and extension] of classical rape narratives such as Lucretia and Philomela”.⁴⁴ (This return to “the raw energy and graphic brutality of Ovid,” observes Starks-Estes, has the effect of “unearthing the subtexts of violence that had been buried in subsequent traditions of the Renaissance lyric.”⁴⁵) Hence, it is not only the pursuit and attainment of the beloved that is depicted as a physical reality, but the complete silencing of the female voice at the hands of the Petrarchan pursuer. Valerie Wayne argues that there “can hardly be a dramatic scene more redolent of feminine repression and the annulment of the subject than when Lavinia staggers onto the stage, her body violated by rape, her tongue cut out so that she cannot speak and her hands severed so that she may not write”.⁴⁶ Marshall, in fact, argues that Lavinia is so thoroughly “undone by this overexposure that for many viewers [she] fails to acquire a sense of subjective identity altogether; for them, she remains merely a sketch, a cartoon, an unfortunate image”.⁴⁷ The scene points, as *The Rape of Lucrece* does, to the dangers of a tradition that prioritises the male voice and silences the voice of the mistress. Therefore, writes Starks-Estes, in *Titus Andronicus* “the violence of the misogyny pent up in the erotic dynamic of the sonnet fully erupts in terrifying acts of sexual violence, revealing this aggression as the extreme of the Petrarchan dynamic”.⁴⁸

The texts critically analysed in this article depict an extreme Petrarchism and its consequences on both lover and beloved in terms of the sexually idealising vision it engenders and the disempowering of both the lover and the beloved it allows. The darker underbelly of the conventional language of desire is exposed in its capacity to enable and justify the mutation of idealisation into disturbing and destructive action on the part of Petrarchan lovers against their mistresses, whose voices and preferences remain either unheard or completely disregarded. Furthermore, Shakespeare’s experimentation with and mastering of various genres enabled him to dramatise these dangers at various levels of intensity, from the introduction of a destructive Petrarchism in his comedy *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, to the revelation of the demonised Petrarchan lover in his narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece* and, finally, to the depiction of the violent climax of each form of Petrarchan idealisation in his tragedy *Titus Andronicus*.

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44 Maus, Introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, in Stephen Greenblatt *et al* (eds), *The Norton Shakespeare* (London and New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2008), p.493.

45 Starks-Estes, *Violence, Trauma, and Virtus*, p.92

46 Wayne, *The Matter of Difference*, p.32.

47 Marshall, *The Shattering of the Self*, p.127.

48 Starks-Estes, “Transforming Ovid”, pp.54–55.