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Lucretia without Poniard: Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft's *Geeraerd van Velsen* between Livy and Tacitus

In this paper we set ourselves the goal of examining the figure of the female protagonist of Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft's historical tragedy *Geeraerd van Velsen* (1613), *Machtelt van Velsen*, in its connection with the classical "archetypical rape victim"¹ Lucretia, transformed by Livy into an *exemplum* of republican *virtus*, feminine *gloria*, conjugal *modestia*, and *castitas*. The intertextual analysis of Dutch early modern dramatic female characters has already proven fruitful, for instance, in the case of Joost van den Vondel's historical drama *Gysbreght van Aemstel*, as studied by Marco Prandoni.² But, obviously, in the case of *Geeraerd van Velsen*, the historical accounts are by no means less relevant as intertexts than the literary sources. According to Geeraardt Brandt, Hooft's first biographer, his play was highly appreciated by all its erudite spectators ("alle geleerden, die daar van oordeelen konden") especially due to its author's capacity to epitomize and clearly represent the best principles of rule and civil wisdom, as carried out by the ancient and modern political and historical writers ("geen kleen deel der burgerlyke wysheit, en beste regeerregels der oude en nieuwe Schryveren, in zoo weining blaaden beknoptelyk begreep, en klaarlyk ontvoude").³ Bringing on stage rival political theories, Hooft bears in mind not only the medieval history of the Netherlands, but also the 'grand narrative' of Roman history: the motif of the fall of Rome, lamented by the Chorus of Amsterdam Maidens, and its rebirth, prophesied by the god of the river Vecht, constitutes the 'macro-historical' frame,

1 Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat. *The Visible and the Invisible: On Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting*. Berlin, Munich, and Boston: de Gruyter, 2015, p. 58.

2 Marco Prandoni. "Intertextuality – *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1637)." *Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679): Dutch Playwright in the Golden Age*, edited by Jan Bloemendal and Willem Korsten. Leiden: Brill, 2012, pp. 271–284.

3 Geeraardt Brandt. *Het leven van Pieter Corn: Hooft en de lykreeden*, edited by Pieter Leendertz, Jr. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1932, pp. 12–13.

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in which the particular episode of Van Velsen's disastrous hubris and Floris V's inglorious murder is only a small part.

As a number of classical scholars have justly observed, in Roman historiography, especially in Livy and Tacitus, the turning points of the development of the state were tightly connected with rape accounts: let us recall the stories of Rhea Silvia, the Sabine Women, and Lucretia herself. Christina Kraus has even coined a special term for this recurrent theme of ancient historical writing – a 'Lucretia story.'⁴ Along with the Livian female hero, Tacitus, moving away from the glorious retrospective *ab urbe condita* to the pessimistic one *ab excessu divi Augusti*, creates the image of an 'anti-Lucretia' – Livia Drusilla, a woman whom Augustus has "stolen away" (*abducta*, a term also connoting rape) from her husband, the great pontiff Tiberius Nero, breaking the legal marriage while she is pregnant.⁵ Instead of committing suicide in the footsteps of Lucretia, she yields to Augustus' decision without any attempt at resistance (Tacitus wonders whether it was done willingly or not) and becomes "terrible to the State as a mother, terrible to the house of the Caesars as a stepmother."⁶ Quite naturally, the prudential cowardice of the elder Tiberius degenerates into the tyrannical laxity of his son, Emperor Tiberius, and the *principatus* becomes a shameful link between trampled freedom and full-fledged tyranny. The shared premise of the two major Roman historians, borrowed by their early modern commentators, was summed up by Jan Gruter (de Gruytere, 1560–1627), the long-standing director of the Bibliotheca Palatina in Heidelberg, in his notes on Livy's expression *spectata castitas*: he writes that "a certain trait of tyranny consists in seeking to offend, as much as possible, the virtues as such" ("nota vera tyrannidis: inquinare velle ipsas, se posset modo, virtutes").⁷ Commenting

⁴ Christina S. Kraus. "INITIUM TURBANDI OMNIA A FEMINA ORTUM EST: Fabia Minor and the Election of 367 B.C." *Phoenix* 24 (1991), pp. 314–325.

⁵ Let us quote the passage from Tacitus (which has been analyzed thoroughly by Thomas E. Strunk. "Rape and Revolution: Tacitus on Livia and Augustus." *Latomus* 73 [2014], pp. 126–148): "abducta Neroni uxor et consulti per ludibrium pontifices an concepto necdum edito partu rite nuberet; †que tedii et† Vedii Pollionis luxus; postremo Liuia grauis in rem publicam mater, grauis domui Caesarum nouerca" (Tacitus. *Annales ab excessu divi Augusti*, edited by Charles Dennis Fisher. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906, I.10.5. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0077>. Accessed 25 July 2018). – The analogy with the 'Lucretia story' is reinforced by the use of the formula "cupidine formae" that echoes literally the Livian narrative. See Christina S. Kraus. "The Tiberian Hexad." *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus*, edited by Anthony J. Woodman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 100–115, p. 114.

⁶ Tacitus, *Ann.*, I.10.5.

⁷ Jan Gruter. "Notae politicae ad T. Livii Historiarum librum I." *Titii Livii Patavini historicorum romanorum principis Libri omnes superstites*. Frankfurt: Guolphgangi Hofmanni, 1627, p. 28.

on Livy's statement that Tarquinius was attracted not only by Lucretia's beauty but by her virtue as well, Gruter backs up his statement by referring to Tacitus' interpretation of the rapes of free-born adolescents by Tiberius: "neque formam tantum & decora corpora; sed in his modestam pueritiam, in aliis imagines majorem."⁸ Gruter's observation explains the centrality of the 'rape accounts' for political theory: the rape of a noble matron functions as an *experimentum crucis*, which is a kind of a 'Machiavellian moment' for any political community. The way in which a given *civitas* reacts to this crucial event determines both its political form (republic or tyranny) and also the meaning of pivotal ethical terms (liberty, virtue, prudence, etc.).

Since the early Renaissance, the 'Lucretia story' has had a fascinating impact on European intellectual and artistic imagery: the interest in it has been considerably fomented by the discovery, around 1500, of an ancient statue interpreted as Lucretia. The 'Lucretia fever,' ranging from numerous representations of this *exemplum* of Roman *pudicitia* and *fides* on Italian *forzieri* and *cassettoni* to the most prominent works of art and literature, puts at stake the pivotal values associated with this figure. Containing the seeds of ambivalence from the very beginning (the 'erotic component' introduced by Ovid and reinforced by Augustine), this archetype of feminine virtue underwent infinite semantic shifts in various narrative, pictorial, and performative contexts in the course of the sixteenth century. As a part of the Livian rhetorical narrative on the origins of Roman grandeur, it was affected by the tectonic change in fashion in early modern political thought pointed out by Giuseppe Toffanin⁹ and a number of scholars following in his footsteps: while in the fifteenth century an interest in Livy prevailed, the following century witnessed a fascination with Tacitus – the number of editions of Tacitus' works in Latin, paraphrases, and commentaries grew exponentially.¹⁰ Like Livy before him, Tacitus was considered not as a matter of a purely academic interest, but as a handbook of political prudence: to use Michel de Montaigne's words, "ce n'est pas un livre à lire c'est un livre à estudier et apprendre,"¹¹ while Justus Lipsius, one of the very first and most fervent promoters of Tacitist political

⁸ Tacitus, *Ann.*, VI.1.

⁹ Giuseppe Toffanin. *Machiavelli e il "tacitismo": la "politica storica" al tempo della controriforma*. Padua: A. Draghi, 1921.

¹⁰ Cf. the diagrams in the article by Elena Valery. "La moda del tacitismo (XVI–XVII secolo)." *Atlante della letteratura italiana*, vol. 2, edited by Erminia Itrace. Turin: Einaudi, 2011, pp. 256–260.

¹¹ Michel de Montaigne. *Les Essais de Michel de Montaigne*, edited by Pierre Villey and Verdun-Louis Saulnier. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1978, pp. 718–719.

ideas, considered his works “quasi theatrum hodiernae vitae.”¹² The pantheon of Livian heroes, Lucretia among them, could not remain intact in the face of this *décalage*, nor could the European drama remain outside this large-scale discursive event.

It is generally stated that “Lucretia barely plays a role in seventeenth-century Dutch literature,” with only two plays by Dirck Pieterz. Pers and Neuyes of Neuye as well as two anonymous dramas dedicated to this topic.¹³ Instead of the politically charged image of a heroic woman, Dutch literature, culminating in Jacob Cats, privileged that of a virtuous wife. Still, the above-mentioned connection between crucial historical events and rape accounts was no less valid for Dutch historical and political thought: as Amanda Pipkin has sarcastically observed, the “Dutch republic required stories of rape to create a nation where none previously existed.”¹⁴

Significantly, the two major historical plays of Dutch Golden Age drama that aimed to restage the national past of the city of Amsterdam and corroborate its centrality among the United Provinces – Hooft’s *Geeraerd van Velsen* (1613) and Vondel’s *Gysbreght van Aemstel* (1638) – revolved around rape accounts. Hooft’s almost obsessive interest in Roman and national history is well known: after *Baeto* (1617), he abandoned drama and dedicated all his efforts to the study of the Dutch past, using Tacitus, whose *History* he read fifty-two times and whose lapidary style he tried to imitate, as an exemplary historical narrative.¹⁵ In his youth, he had been no less eager to imitate the ancient Roman historians and poets, and it was in this context that the figure of Lucretia emerged for the first time. In 1609, Hooft was commissioned to compose the rhymed inscriptions for the so-called *Vertoningen* – *tableaux vivants* celebrating the Twelve Years’ Truce between the Netherlands and Spain. Lucretia was chosen as an allegory of the United Provinces. In these verse inscriptions Hooft sticks very closely to the commonplaces of the republican Lucretia myth:

The holiest thing Lucretia had devoted to her husband,
The King’s son Sextus has stolen out of a stupid passion and envy.
Lucretia had witnesses of her fidelity:
Before her husband – her blood, and before God – her spirit.

12 Arnaldo Momigliano. “The First Political Commentary on Tacitus.” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947), pp. 91–101, p. 91.

13 Hammer-Tugendhat, *The Visible and the Invisible*, p. 31.

14 Amanda C. Pipkin. *Every Woman’s Fear: Stories of Rape and Dutch Identity in the Golden Age*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008, p. 23.

15 Simon Groenveld. “Pieter Corneliszoon Hooft en de geschiedenis van zijn eigen tijd.” *Hooft als historieschrijver: twee studies*. Weesp: Heureka, 1981, pp. 7–46, pp. 23–27.

Lucretia's misadventure depressed the people to such an extent,
 That they, on Brutus's admonition, abjured the Kings.
 Brutus esteemed the freedom of his country so highly,
 That he did not spare the life of his own children.¹⁶

Here we see a kind of a summary or *credo* of the Livian republican myth: Lucretia as a symbol of fidelity; the people who react immediately to oppression by drastically changing the political form of the state; Brutus as a fervent defender of freedom. Two sacrificial deaths – Lucretia's suicide and the killing of Brutus' sons by their own father – are connoted positively and used to impress the audience by an accumulation of bloody acts (two murders in eight lines). This spectacularity was present already in the Livian account. Here Lucretia, a *matrona* molested by the Roman king's son, prepares herself for suicide, but takes great care to have her death observed by the sympathetic and interested public. Ovid, who contributed greatly to the classical image of Lucretia, introduced a very important category to the description of her suicide – that of *honestum*: “even then she took care in dying so that she fell/With decency, that was her care even in falling” (“tunc quoque iam moriens ne non procumbat honeste/respicit; haec etiam cura cadentis erat”).¹⁷ In Cicero, the notion of *honestum* meant something morally beautiful and at the same time coinciding with the civilly useful (*utile*). This category is endowed with a great spectacular potential: *honestum* is a revelation of the transcendental in the pagan world, it requires demonstration; otherwise it remains unknown. The demonstration of *honestum* is always linked to a singular person. The pagan hero dies in order to prove that *honestum* exists and that he himself is acting for the sake of *honestum*. In the “honest” deed, spectacularity and publicity go hand in hand with exemplarity; significantly, the main reason for Lucretia's suicide, as she herself states it, is the fear of being a bad *exemplum* if she lived on: “nec ulla deinde impudica Lucretiae exemplo viveret.” Considering herself as part – or, rather, a departing point – of the virtuous Roman history, Lucretia is very concerned with founding it upon a righteous *exemplum*. Livy shows us how her admonition – “si vos viri estis” – and death itself weigh as a fatal burden

16 “'t Heylighst dat Lucrees haer Man had toegewijt, / Rooft Sextus 's Koninghs Soon, uyt dulle brandt en nijdt // Van Lucretias trouw getuygen zijn geweest, / Haer bloedt voor haren man, en voor de Goôn haer' geest. // Lucretias misval 't verdruckte volck soo deert, / Dat het op Brutus eysch de Koningen versweert // De Vryheyte van sijn Landt staet Brutus voor soo waert, / Dat hy sijn Soons daer voor niet van de dootd en spaert” (Pieter C. Hooft. *Gedichten van P. C. Hooft*, edited by Frederik A. Stoett. Amsterdam: P. N. van Kampen & zoon, 1899, pp. 85–86.)

17 P. Ovidius Naso. *Ovid's Fasti*, edited by James G. Frazer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933, II.833–834. <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a2008.01.0547>. Accessed 25 July 2018.

on the shoulders of the spectators. With Lucretia the “age of virtues” (*aetas virtutum*)¹⁸ begins, with myriads of (mainly masculine) heroes seeking the glory of a decorous death for their homeland (Fabii, Curtii, Decii, etc.). Thus Lucretia turns out to be a pivotal figure in the history of Roman liberty: Cicero in *De finibus bonorum et malorum* names her as “a cause of the liberty of the state” (“*causa civitati libertatis*”).¹⁹ Acting like a deity (in Ovid, Brutus states that Lucretia’s spirit became a *numen* for him), she breaks the seal of dissimulation, making visible Brutus’ hidden virtues (“*iam satis est virtus dissimulata diu*”) – from a stupid brute, derided by the prince and his fellows, Brutus changes into a consul and *pater patriae*.

But this cartoonish image of a heroic sacrifice does not fit the ethics we meet in *Geeraerdt van Velsen*. Hooft’s tragedy appears as a kind of a palimpsest, preserving the half-vanished, but still recognizable traces of the ‘Lucretia myth,’ but at the same time imbued with other motives. The ascent of the Tacitist historiography and post-Machiavellian political rhetoric privileged the rise of new *exempla* and concepts: under monarchy, the virtuous suicide of a republican-minded hero proves to be totally useless. One can find in Tacitus a variety of examples of how harmful heroic behavior may be: these examples were analyzed in detail by sixteenth-century commentators. Thus, in the *Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito* (1594) by Scipione Ammirato, one of the most famous and influential Tacitist writers of that time, we find a characteristic gloss on the tragic story of the Senator Publius C. Thrasea Paetus (Book XVI of the *Annales*), a Stoic of impeccable reputation, who scandalized Nero several times – a conduct that resulted in a death sentence in the form of *liberum mortis arbitrium*:

In spite of the fact that you should never, for whatever reason, and whatever example you want to follow, commit anything wrong, you should nonetheless take into consideration whether your intention, however excellent it may be, may succeed or not, and whether the time allows it. Because otherwise it may prove vain for any living person, and sometimes may even be dangerous and disastrous for one who has undertaken it. Such a story has been narrated about Thrasea: in fact he, with his severe manners, has not been of any use to the Senate, he did not open to others the way to freedom, and to himself caused death.²⁰

¹⁸ We are referring to Livy’s famous expression “*nulla aetas virtutum feracior*” in *Ab urbe condita*, IX.16.19.

¹⁹ II.20.17.

²⁰ “Con tutto ciò come che per niuna occasione, e per niun tempo, & con niuno esempio debba mai alcuno operar male, dee nondimeno in quella cosa, che egli ha in animo di fare, benché ottima, considerare, se è per riuscire; & se i tempi ciò permettono, accioche senza far utile a persona vivente la sua impresa non riesca vana, & talora con pericolo & pregiudicio di chi l’ha tentata, come fu detto di Trasea, il quale con certi modi suoi severi, non fece al senato utile alcuno; a

It was the same Thrasea who stopped his friend, the young tribune Rusticus Arulenus, when he wanted to make use of his *veto* right to block the *senatus consultum* sentencing Thrasea to death – this act would be useless for Thrasea himself and harmful for Arulenus' political carrier (“ne vana et reo non profutura, intercessori exitiosa inciperet,”²¹ says Tacitus in the *Annales*). And this in spite of the fact, stressed by Tacitus and repeated by Scipione Ammirato, that Arulenus could hardly do anything less worthwhile than such an intercession. Thrasea's story gives the impression of a sad irony: under the conditions of the principate, his heroic suicide loses its exemplarity and publicity; now it is a *private* choice, but even as such it is conditioned and controlled by the state. In fact, the very terms of the verdict condemning Thrasea point to the fact that the only residue of liberty left to the subject is that of a voluntary death – *liberum mortis arbitrium*.

Thus, the glorious sacrifice is transformed into a useless suicide, the public martyrdom into a private death, perfectly senseless for the *civitas*: in the technical language of rhetoric, this semantic shift was expressed in the figure of *paradiastole*. Quentin Skinner points to the “insidious figure” of *paradiastole*, “the precise purpose of which was to show that any given action can always be redescribed in such a way as to suggest that its moral character may be open to some measure of doubt,”²² in order to explain the seventeenth-century semantic revolution in political and ethical thought. It was this “rhetorical challenge to the moral science”²³ that the seventeenth-century political theoreticians, such as Thomas Hobbes, had to deal with. By calling a ruler “prudential” rather than “cowardly,” we act *paradiastolically*: in drama, which was a forensic art performing persuasion and fomenting political passions, the use of this *schema* of thought was by no means less in demand than in deliberative oratory. On a par with other key concepts of humanist ethical-rhetorical culture, such as *virtue*, *right reason*, or *natural law*, the Livian exemplary narrative of Lucretia's heroic suicide finds itself involved in the process of the post-Machiavellian *paradiastolic* revolution. This inversion of the key terms and commonplaces affected drama as well. Let us cite just one example: the way in which Samuel Pufendorf and, later, the brothers Pieter and Johan De la Court interpreted an apophthegmatic verse from Seneca the Younger's tragedy *Hercules furens*: “Cogi qui potest nescit mori” (“Who can

gli altri non aperse la via alla libertà, & a se diede occasione di rovinare” (Scipione Ammirato. *Discorsi sopra Cornelio Tacito nuovamente posti in luce*. Florence: Filippo Giunti, 1598, p. 368).

21 Tacitus, *Ann.*, XVI.26.16.

22 Quentin Skinner. “The Study of Rhetoric as an Approach to Cultural History: The Case of Hobbes.” *Main Trends in Cultural History: Ten Essays*, edited by Willem Melching and Wyger Velema. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994, pp. 17–53, p. 18.

23 Ibid.

be compelled does not know how to die"). In the context of Seneca's text (and for most of his readers), this saying meant a glorification of the heroic ethos, the readiness of the female protagonist of the tragedy, Megara, to die rather than yield to her oppressor. But, paradoxically, both Pufendorf and the De la Courts interpret it as a warning against the impudence of those who despise death and are therefore indifferent to any political or ethical obligation.²⁴

In the particular case of Lucretia, it was Machiavelli himself who largely contributed to its paradiastolic rereading with his *Mandragola*. The main problem of Machiavelli's comedy is procreation. The main character's wife – Lucrezia – is sterile, but at the same time she and her elderly husband are obsessed with the idea of having a child. A young scoundrel, Callimaco, in love with Lucrezia, decides to make use of this: with the help of her spiritual father, he convinces her and her husband to accept adultery as the only way to have a child, while the adulterer, as they claim, will die from the miraculous remedy Lucrezia will take in order to become pregnant. At first, the pious and virtuous Lucrezia rejects this abominable idea:

But of all the things discussed, this seems to me the strangest: to have to submit my body to this shame, to be the cause of a man's death for shaming me. Because even if I was the last woman left in the world and if the human race was to rise again from me, I don't believe that I would be allowed to do something like this.²⁵

24 "[R]eligione remota, civitatum firmitas intrinseca in incerto foret, ac ad cives in officio continendos, haudquaquam sufficeret metus temporalis poenae, fides superioribus data, ejusque servandae gloria, et gratitudo, quod ope summi imperii a miseriis status naturalis defendatur. Tunc enim revera locum haberet, QUI MORI SCIT, COGI NESCI: quippe cum Deum non metuentibus nihil magis quam mors metui possit, huic contemnendae quis sufficeret, in imperantes quaevis futura tentare possit" (Samuel Pufendorf. *De officio hominis et civis secundum legem naturalem libri duo*. Lugduni Batavorum: Sam. et Joh. Luchtmans, 1769, p. 161); "Heeft de onderlinghe vreesse voor vernieling, de politie, of tugt bedagt, en uit sich selven voor-gebragt; volgens het oude spreekwoord, *Qui mori scit, Cogi nescit*, die niet vreesde te sterven, kan niet gedwongen, of geregeerd werden. Dewijl ook aan allerhande slag van menschen de tugt genoegsaam even noodzakelik is, so moet hier uit volgen, dat een Natie die best getugtigd is geweest, ook boven de anderen in deugd, en rijkdom, sal uit-steeken: Want uit een wel-gestelde generale politie, moet de Tugt by de menschen in't bysonder, volgen; door dien de selve Wetten, en straffen, tegen alle misdaden stelleden, die tot ondergang van het leven, en verlies van goed strekken; so kan de mensch op het geene hy verkregen heeft, sijn staat en reekening maken" (Johan and Pieter de la Court. *Politike discoursen handelende in ses onderscheide boeken van Staden, Landen, Oorlogen, Kerken, Regeringen en Zeeden*. Amsterdam: Pieter Hackius, 1662, p. 244).

25 Niccolò Machiavelli. *Mandragola*, translated by Nerida Newbigin. 2009, p. 21. http://www.personal.usyd.edu.au/~nnew4107/Texts/Sixteenth-century_Florence_files/Mandragola_Translation.pdf. Accessed 25 July 2018.

One of the arguments set forth by Lucrezia's spiritual father is a reference to the Old Testament story of the incestuous daughters of Lot:

you have to consider the purpose in all these things. And your purpose is to fill a seat in paradise and make your husband happy. The Bible says that the daughters of Lot, thinking that they were the last women left in the world, lay with their father. And because their intention was good, they did not sin.²⁶

Finally, Lucrezia gives her assent and feels happy after the adultery, as do all the characters in *Mandragola*. The parodic inversion of the Livian account of ancient Lucretia's heroic defense of chastity is more than obvious. The characters of *Mandragola* prefer survival and procreation to death for the sake of ethical norms. Machiavelli's play permitted contemporaries to see the link between the author and Tacitus – a historian, who, unlike Livy, exposed the rules of surviving under the conditions of a catastrophe. The diabolic nature ascribed to Machiavelli in the Renaissance and beyond was due to his willingness to look at *honestum* through the lens of sociology, not individual ethics. The multitude of people that constitute the state are supposed to have the wish to live, not to die. Former philosophers sought to dissuade citizens from fearing death; Machiavelli sets himself the goal of recreating in them the sane and natural fear of perishing.

In the Netherlands, we find a characteristic sample of this paradiastolic use of Lucretia's image in Joost van den Vondel's "Amusing introduction" to his *Vorstelijcke warande der dieren* (1617). Here this figure significantly appears in the carnivalesque atmosphere of wandering in the "labyrinth of imagination." In the center of the garden labyrinth, the company of "princes" guided by the author stumble at what they thought was a statue of the dying Lucretia:

But what is this Lucretia, so well featured, hiding in the green her white naked limbs?
And threatening death to herself? Not only does she threaten, but stabs!
She pierces her heart! Look, look, how the blood bursts forth,
How her blood is pouring out
Of the wound, and falls down slowly,
And is collected there by the sculptor's skill.
Do not be afraid: it is just an appearance:
It is not woman's blood, it is only red wine
That Bacchus will serve to Kings
And others who are resting here, exhausted by the thirst, in the shade.
[...]

26 Ibid.

Fare well, Lucretia: if someone was a bit too rude
 Or too tyrannical, while sucking your blood,
 Take into consideration that he did it while tormented by the strongest thirst.²⁷

This parodic justification of tyrannical ‘bloodthirstiness,’ this anamorphic transformation of Lucretia, an archetype of republican virtue, into a phantom, a kind of a *simulacrum libertatis*, obviously refers to the burlesque images from the *Ragguagli di Parnaso* of Traiano Boccalini²⁸: the Tacitist *occhiali politici*, which allow us to see the hidden thoughts of the rulers; other glasses, which preserve people from seeing horrible and abominable aspects of this world; special pencils, with which the rulers can depict white as black and black as white. As in the case of Boccalini, the use of these tricks is not confined to a simple entertainment or a satirical representation of a political reality that has degenerated through the fault of the Tacitists and Machiavellists. The tragic Lucretia on closer inspection is transformed into a merry Bacchus: the grotesque transforms the *topos* into a *simulacrum*, or, rather, blurs the borderline between them.

In his ethical message based on political irenicism, prudence, and moderation, Hooft exploits the effects of the paradiastolic shift of the ‘Lucretia story.’

The affinity between Machtelt and Lucretia has already been underlined by Jan W. Verkaik and, much earlier, by Busken Huet. In addition to the general common frame – the raping of a noble wife by a Roman king’s son –, they point to verse 313 of the first act: “Machtelt immediately abandoned her wool work” (“Vrouw Machtelt staeckte’ haer naeldwerck knap”),²⁹ echoing, in their opinion, Livy’s image of Lucretia as a virtuous matron, *dedita lanae*.³⁰ Verkaik quotes Jacob Jansz. Colevelt, the author of the historical drama *Droef-eyndend-spel, tusschen Graef Floris, en Gerrit van Velsen* (1628), where the parallel between Machtelt

27 “Maer wat Lucretia, van maecksel wel besneden, / Verberghet daer in het groen haer blancke en naeckte leden? / En dreyght haer selfs de dood? Zij dreyght niet, och zij steeckt! / Zij quetst haer selven ‘thert! Ziet ziet hoe’t bloed uytbreeckt: / Hoe’t bloed de wonde ontvloeyt, en daelt met groot verlangen / Benedenwaerts, daer ‘t word behendelijck gevanghen, / Door s’kunsten-aers bedrijf. Verschrickt niet, ‘it is maer schijn, / ‘Ten is geen vrouwen bloed, ‘tis enckel rooden wijn: / Die Bacchus is ghewoon te schenken voor de Vorsten, / En andere die vermoeyt hier inde schaduw dorsten. [...] Vaert wel Lucretia: zoo yemant wat te groff / Of te tyrannig u’t bloed heeft afgezoghen, / Denckt dat versmachten dorst tot sulcx hem heeft bewoghen” (Joost van den Vondel. *Vorstelijcke warande der dieren: Waer in de Zeden-rijcke Philosophie, Poetisch, Morael, en Historiael, vermakelijck en treffelijck wort voorgesteld*. Amsterdam: Jan Blom, 1717, s.p.).

28 Arthur Weststeijn. “The Power of ‘Pliant Stuff’: Fables and Frankness in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republicanism.” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72 (2011), pp. 1–27, p. 8.

29 Hooft is quoted from the following edition: Pieter C. Hooft. *Geeraerd van Velsen*, edited by A. J. J. de Witte, 2nd edition. Zutphen: W. J. Thieme & Cie, 1976.

30 Jan W. Verkaik. *De moord op graaf Floris V*. Hilversum: Verloren, 1996, p. 25.

and Lucretia is stated explicitly.³¹ In the introductory monologue by Machtelt van Velsen, we may see that some points of the ‘Lucretia story’ are preserved: for instance, the irreversibility and impossibility of expiating or even attenuating the rapist’s misdeed; neither her relatives nor her husband are able to forget the misdemeanor (“Nu is ‘er niemandt van mijn Maeghen, noch mijn Man/Die’s lasters heughenis, helaes! Af leeren kan”).³² But, obviously, in the crucial point they drastically differ: instead of committing suicide and instigating her relatives and friends to avenge her, she assumes a hesitant, Hamlet-like stance towards death,³³ and tries to mitigate her husband’s wrath.³⁴ Machtelt refuses to follow Lucretia; instead, she advises her husband to give up and to forget her injury for the sake of the common good (“s Lands welvaart”).³⁵ She tries her best to hide “deep in her breast” any trace of her sorrow. However, she emphatically invokes death several times, first in terms somewhat similar to the ritual of the punishment of Vestals for having lost her chastity (“oh, if only this living corpse could be bricked up by thick walls/in an underground grave”).³⁶ Secondly (“O Vaeder goedt...” etc.), her invocation to death brings on stage two very important

31 “Lucretia wel eer ontsielde selfs haer siel / Beclaeglijck waert dat sy in sulcken saeck verviel.” Verkaik also quotes Johannes a Leydis, an early humanist historian of the Netherlands, who described Machtelt’s conduct after the rape as similar to Lucretia’s (*instar Lucretiae*) (see *De moord*, p. 25).

32 Hooft, *Geeraerd van Velsen*, 1.73. – Cf. also another verse: “Wat is het sterffelijck gheslachte swack en broos? / O Godt, hoe licht vergrijpt een uyr, door ‘t radeloos / Bestaen van moedwil slincx, ‘t gheen eeuwichheys verlenghen / Met alle ‘s wijsheys Raedt niet weer te recht kan brengen!” (1.63–66).

33 “Doch, is de dootd, dien de gheluckighe vervloecken, / Te waerden gast, om my verfoeyde te besoecken? / Soo zijt ghy welkoom my in mynen banghen noot, / O sorchsachtende slaep nae-maeghe vande dootd” (*ibid.*, 1.125–129).

34 “Indien een vrouw betaemt te segghen haer ghevoelen, / Soo bid ick laet den brandt van onse smart bekoelen, / dat onse leedt, en de besondren haet, / Niet boven liefde van ‘t ghemeene best en gaet” (*ibid.*, 3.813–816).

35 Setting aside personal offenses in the name of the common good was also a kind of a topos in the Tacitist literature – let us quote the above-mentioned Scipione Ammirato: “Deve dunque un buon cittadino per amor della patria dimenticare l’ingiurie private, il che prudentemente fu ancora da altri avvertito, Et se ciò facciamo per la patria, quando viviamo à Republica, il medesimo habbiamo à fare per lo nostro Principe vivendosi a stato regio, & non solo condonar l’ingiurie, ma la vita, & la riputazione, & tutte le cose più care s’hanno à metter per seruigio di quel, che riconosciamo per nostro capo, col quale va congiunto il bene del regno, & della patria” (Ammirato, *Discorsi*, p. 8).

36 “Oft waer dit levend’ lijck ghemetst, met dicke muyren / In onderaerdsche tomb’ om d’ongheluckighe’ uyren / Te brenghen aen een eyndt, en d’overmaet van tijdt, / Die ‘t straffe nootdloet my weyghert te schelden quijt” (Hooft, *Geeraerd van Velsen*, 1.29–32).

categories – Fate (*Noodlodt*) and Providence; according to Jan W. H. Konst,³⁷ like the later Baeto, she consciously relies upon “a web, spun by the causes” (“’t Web geweven van óorzaaken”), and her passive “Stoic” stance proves to be justified by the god of the river Vecht, “revealing the mysteries of fate” (“verborgentheyt des noodlots”)³⁸ and explaining the necessity of the protagonist’s suffering for the future glory of Amsterdam. The real suicide of the historical Machtelt and the quartering of her husband are intentionally omitted from the tragedy, transforming the historical *tragedia* into a *comedia* in the Aristotelian sense of the word. Let us now recall that Machiavelli had intended to teach classically trained people to fear death again – in the name of the common good. In *Geeraerd van Velsen*, as well as in *Gysbreght van Aemstel* by Vondel, it is women who assume the role of dissuading the classical hero from seeking *honestum* at the expense of his own life – in the former case, Machtelt van Velsen, in the latter Badeloch, Gysbreght’s wife, who is instructed, however, by Machtelt in a dream.

A significant ambivalence affects the notion of revenge: in the ‘Lucretia story,’ it is represented as a legitimate and laudable affect, the *conditio sine qua non* of true liberty. In *Geeraerd van Velsen*, the theme of revenge is closely connected to the problem of *Widerstandsrecht* – the right of resistance to tyrannical power.³⁹ Van Aemstel, the author’s spokesperson in the tragedy, adheres to the moderate position,⁴⁰ claiming that the right of judging the ruler belongs exclusively to the States, whereas the protagonist, Van Velsen, adopts a radical monarchomachic stance, claiming that every subject has the right to sentence a tyrant (“De minste van het volck is Halsheer des tyrans”).⁴¹ In Hooft’s tragedy, the private affects clash with the Batavian constitutionalist myth, freshly forged by Hugo Grotius in his *De antiquitate reipublicae Batavae* (1610), in which the restoration of the Netherlands’ true constitution is only possible if the conspirators are not blinded by their thirst for revenge (“verblindt u niet de wraeck”).⁴² Another vehicle of the author’s political views, the Chorus of Amsterdam Maidens (*Rey van Aemstellandsche Jofferen*), also speaks of the resistance to

37 Jan W. H. Konst. *Fortuna, Fatum en Providentia Dei in de Nederlandsche tragedie, 1600–1720*. Hilversum: Verloren, 2003.

38 Hooft, *Geeraerd van Velsen*, 5.1493.

39 For a thorough analysis of this aspect of *Geeraerd van Velsen*, see Bettina Noak. *Politische Auffassungen im niederländischen Drama des 17. Jahrhunderts*. Münster: Waxmann Verlag, 2002, pp. 101–126.

40 “Wil ’t beste deel des volcx verheert zijn van Tyrannen, / Het oordeel staet an haer: des dulden zy, elck een / Die dulde dan met haer, oft geev’ hem elders heen” (Hooft, *Geeraerd van Velsen*, 3.786–788).

41 Ibid., 2.464.

42 Ibid., 3.783.

tyranny in terms of a sacrificial act rather than a regicide.⁴³ If, in the case of Lucretia, revenge is a political act, directed towards the common good, in that of Machtelt and Gerard van Velsen it is nothing but a subversive and politically dangerous egoistic affect.

But what is the difference between the “blind thirst for revenge” of Van Velsen and Van Woerden and “the laudable revenge” (“het loffelycke wreecken”) of Brutus, the male protagonist of the ‘Lucretia story’? The name of Brutus is cited twice in the play: the first time, it is recalled by Harman van Woerden, who states that neither Brutus nor Epaminondas nor any other ancient or modern hero would be able to heal a republic in which the supreme power is desperately corrupted.⁴⁴ In the second case, Brutus is invoked as an archetype of the avenger, capable of instilling fear into the tyrants and their heirs.⁴⁵ The figure of Brutus is profiled against the background of the faded glory of Rome, being at Van Velsen’s time nothing but an “unburied corpse,”⁴⁶ whose crown is covered with cobweb and his sword with rust; as a part of this antiquarian story, he is nothing but a powerless ghost, whose affects are not convertible to the political language of the modern era. The attempt to imitate Brutus’ noble revenge – as well as Lucretia’s noble suicide – in the new political context results in damage to the public good: the ancient heroism, to use Giambattista Vico’s term, is “civilly impossible”⁴⁷ in the post-Machiavellian era.⁴⁸

43 “Den oopenbaeren Dwinghelandt, / Met moed te bieden wederstandt, / En op den harssenpan te treden; / Om, met het storten van zijn bloedt, / Den vaderlande ‘t swaerste goedt, / Den gulden vryheyt te bereeden” (ibid., 4.1240–1245).

44 “Dat konde d’eerste nocht de tweede Brutus niet. / Nocht die in ’t vrouwenkleedt als mannelijck bevryder / Zijns Vaederlants hem droech. En waer ’t dat het een yder / Soo nauw soud nemen als Epaminond en ghy; / Doen Thebe’, en Hollandt nu, bleven in slaverny” (ibid., 3.756–760).

45 “Och had zy konnen oock de boose lusten breecken / Daer uwer Koninghen gheslacht is toe ghewendt! / En had doch Brutus, met het loffelycke wreecken, / Omsiende vreesse den naekoorders ingheprendt! / Soo souden nu ter tydt de vreesse wy ontbeeren, / Die ons beleeghert heeft met anxten en verdriet. / Maer, laes! het lichte luck noch trouwe wraeck verleeren / Der grooten kinderen haer woeste moedwil niet” (ibid., 2.649–656).

46 “Nu zydy immers meer niet, dan een onbegraven / Ghebalsemt lijck, verselschap met bestoven kleên, / Beraechde Croonen, opghehanghen Scepterstaven, / En waepens uytghedient, en swaerden afghestreên” (ibid., 2.621–624).

47 On the notion of the “civil impossibility” of heroes in Vico, see Enrico Nuzzo. *Tra religione e prudenza: La “filosofia pratica” di Giambattista Vico*. Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2007, pp. 240–255.

48 The subversive impact of “Machiavellism” *ante litteram* on the ancient Romans and Greeks is described in the monologue of *Bedroch* (ll. 205–217), which uses the famous fox/lion metaphor from *The Prince*.

“Dus wederstreef niet meer uw trouwe gemaelin”: this admonition, which the archangel Raphael directs at the male protagonist of Vondel’s *Gysbreght van Aemstel* at the culminating moment of the tragedy when the hero firmly decides to die together with his soldiers in the stronghold of Aemstel, rejecting his wife’s prudent advice, reveals both the challenge to the Livian republican tradition and the significant change of the position of the female character in Dutch drama. Like the god of the river Vecht in *Geeraerd van Velsen*, the archangel acts as a *deus ex machina*, justifying the moderate attitude of the female protagonist at the very moment when it seems totally eclipsed by the inflexible word of the man. Being confined to the passive position by her social role, the female protagonist regains power through the intervention of superhuman forces: Stoic/Christian providence/fate, converting disasters and personal catastrophes into the triumph of the whole *civitas*. The rehabilitation of the marginalized feminine voice meant the restoration of the marginalized political position, the triumph of political prudence over the heroic ethos. According to Livy, the immediate outcome of Lucretia’s heroic death was the overthrow of royal power in Rome and the establishment of the Republic: *romana libertas*. It seems appropriate to recall that some days before the tragic event, Roman citizens – Lucretia’s and King Tarquinius’ son among them – organized a kind of competition between married women, and Lucretia was recognized as the best among Roman wives. Immolating the best part is necessary in order to make of the Roman citizens true *virī* capable of taking power and creating a new state which, according to Livy, would be a perfect one. By virtue of Lucretia’s voluntary sacrifice, Roman *virtus* managed to outlive the political collapse of the Empire; by virtue of Machtelt’s refusal to follow her example, Amsterdam got the chance to become a new Rome. The choice between Lucretia and Livia, between the rejection of political violence and its acceptance as a sort of benevolent policy is now enriched by a third possibility – Stoic providentialism, reconciling the tension between private injuries and the common good in the face of God-guided history.