

Meaning in Five Notes:

Britten's Lucretia motif and Its Narrative Implications

Abstract

In recent research into the ways that meaning can be conveyed to an audience through musical signs or symbols, vocal music has been largely overlooked, in favor of purely instrumental works. In Britten's opera, *The Rape of Lucretia*, the implications of the text and music often seem at odds with each other, with, as is frequently true in opera, the music seeming to offer meaning far beyond that expressed solely through the work's verbiage. Using one of the opera's major motifs (known as the "Lucretia motif"), this paper explores the ways in which this five-note figure is able to shape the listener's understanding of the drama, altering the meaning of the text used alongside it. The implications of the Lucretia motif's presence (and absence) throughout the opera are far-reaching, especially when it comes to understanding the resolution of the opera. Through the lens of this figure, it is possible, not only to gain a deeper understanding of Britten's opera, but also to see one of the many ways in which narrative music theory might be applied to texted vocal music in general.

TW: Rape and Suicide, as portrayed in Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* and related literature

Introduction

Finding meaning in music is an often sought after goal of musical analysis. Leonard Ratner, Kofi Agawu, Raymond Monelle, and many other recent music theorists have devoted their work, using semiotics and musical narrative, to finding meaning in music.¹ Much of this body of work focuses solely on narrative in instrumental music and often seems to avoid texted vocal music. Seth Monahan, in “Action and Agency Revisited,” openly discusses this dichotomy and questions whether his agential model is “even up to the task of dealing with analyses of vocal music.”² Using Benjamin Britten and Ronald Duncan’s *The Rape of Lucretia*, I set out to give one example of how a narrative analysis of texted vocal music can provide insight into the overall narrative of a dramatic work.

An audience’s understanding of *The Rape of Lucretia* is guided by a series of motives that are identified with characters within the drama. One of these motives, termed the “Lucretia motif” is presented first sung by the characters, paired with specific text—a form which I refer to as the “texted” form of the motive.³ Subsequently, the motive appears without text, but still carrying the connotations of its previous form. These appearances, which I term “untexted,” add dramatic connotations to any other material sung overtop of them. Throughout the course of the opera, Britten uses the motif to reflect upon and enhance the drama in clear and rather overt ways. Then, when dramatic context is changed by the events of the story, the narrative impact of the motif changes dramatically, allowing the listener a unique perspective on the story’s conclusion. Through this study of the occurrences of the motif and their individual dramatic purposes, I set out to show how the Lucretia motif impacts the audience’s understanding of *The Rape of Lucretia* and enhances the dramatic experience thereof.

In his 1979 book, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, Peter Evans catalogues Britten’s musical output by offering cursory information about each of Britten’s many works. It is here that the term “Lucretia motif” is first used to describe the distinctive quintuplet figure that Britten uses to set his protagonist’s name. Even in his brief description of the work, the insistent usage of the motif is noted. In fact, he claims its usage “becomes an irritating

¹ Leonard Ratner and his student Kofi Agawu, as well as fellow theorist Raymond Monelle, are leaders in the field of narrative music theory, a recent semiotic approach to the understanding of music. See Leonard Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form, and Style* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1995); V. Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classical Music* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); and Raymond Monelle, *The Musical Topic: Hunt, Military and Pastoral* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

² See Seth Monahan, “Action and Agency Revisited,” *Journal of Music Theory* 57, no. 2 (2013): 321-371. Here Monahan offers a model for discussing agency in music clearly, but applies his findings only to purely instrumental music.

³ For the first use of the phrase “Lucretia motif” see Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten* (London: Dent, 1979), 124-144.

labouring of the obvious.”⁴ J.P.E. Harper Scott, in his article “Britten’s opera about rape,” asserts that it is through “irritating” repetition that Lucretia is identified by this motive as a “chaste woman.”⁵ This is where significant scholarship on the Lucretia motif ends. There are certainly other sources that reference the use of motif in Britten, but mostly with regards to leitmotif and the character of Peter Grimes. Insofar as material to further explain our understanding of *The Rape of Lucretia*, we must look toward outside scholarship on motivic writing and how it is used in opera.

The enormous body of work on motifs in Wagner, of course, is central here. The different forms of motivic construction, with respect to both Wagner and his predecessors, have been carefully catalogued and the origins of his leitmotif traced with exacting detail. In his 2015 book, *Understanding the Leitmotif*, Matthew Bribitzer-Stull documents the difference between two pertinent forms of motif: the leitmotif and the reminiscence theme.⁶ The leitmotif is a “highly integrated” theme, which “parallels the vagaries of the drama,” while reminiscence themes (which are older constructs) are “static blocks that intrude upon the musical texture,” unchanged from iteration to iteration.⁷ Put simply, leitmotifs evolve musically with the drama, while reminiscence themes do not. So then, a motif like the Lucretia motif, which does not evolve musically, at least initially, would seem superficially to resemble a reminiscence theme. The motif in question does evolve associatively, however, through Britten’s pairing of novel text with the musically unchanging theme. This sets the Lucretia motif apart, as a different kind of motif altogether.

⁴ Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 131. Evans discusses the motif at length, but does not suggest a reason for Britten’s repetition thereof.

⁵ See J.P.E. Harper-Scott, “Britten’s Opera About Rape,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 21, no. 01 (2009): 65-88.

⁶ This distinction is pertinent to the subject of this book, which focuses on defining what exactly classifies a motive a “leitmotif.” See Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, *Understanding the Leitmotif* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁷ See Bribitzer-Stull, *Understanding the Leitmotif*, 6-8.

Texted occurrences - Learning the vocabulary of the work

From its very first occurrence, the Lucretia motif is both distinctive and memorable. Heard first in the voice of Tarquinius (fig. 1), the motif is then repeated in three-fold between Tarquinius, Junius, and Collatius, driving it immediately into the audience’s ear (fig. 2).⁸ The motif’s construction immediately sets it apart from the rest of the texture, its quintuple rhythm distinct from music mostly constructed in either duple or triple divisions. Further, its double neighbor figure (the motion from C sharp to A sharp, emphasizing and surrounding the tonic note, B), helps immediately to make the figure memorable. The several hundred repetitions heard in the next five minutes of music (Evans’s “irritating labouring of the obvious”), promise that the audience will not only recognize the figure when it returns, but also that they will associate it specifically with Lucretia’s name.⁹

Fig. 1 (p.30 - Tarquinius)



Fig. 2 (p.30-31 - Tarquinius, Junius, Collatinus)



Following the first several occurrences and the establishment of the motif as a sign for Lucretia, Britten begins to layer further meaning on to the five-note figure. With Junius’s feverish monologue on his fears that the Roman people will favor Collatinus in his place (seen

⁸ The musical examples seen throughout are transcribed from Benjamin Britten and Ronald Duncan. See Benjamin Britten and Ronald Duncan, *The Rape of Lucretia* (Full Score), Op. 37 (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1947).

⁹ See Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 131.

below, in figure 3), Britten introduces two more significant elements for the development of the Lucretia motif. First, a triplet truncation, a shorthand for the motif, which omits the low neighbor part of the figure, using only the first three notes of the quintuplet, then falling to fifth scale degree resting tone, as before. This truncation allows Britten to use the motif with texts that would become encumbered by the quintuple figure, but still allows the text to be highlighted, draw out of the duple texture that surrounds it. The second element which this occurrences adds is much more significant, however. Britten’s use of the word “chastity” on the second of these triplet occurrences begins the process of compounding meaning for this motif: moving forward the motif no longer refers solely to Lucretia, but “Lucretia, the chaste.”

Fig. 3 (p.39 - Junius)

Jun. *cresc.*
Not be-cause of bat-tles he has won but be-cause Lu - cre - tia's chaste and the

Jun. *f* *p*
Ro-mans be - ing wan - ton wor-ship chas - ti - ty. *ppp* Lu - cre - - - tia!

Fig. 4 (p.40 - Male Chorus, Flute, Oboe, Bassoon)

Fl. *pp* *5*

M. C. *ppp* *3* *5* *pp* *sempre pp*
Col-la-ti-nus is po-li-ti-cal-ly a-sture to choose a vir-tu-ous wife. Col-

Ob. *pp* *5*

Bsn. *pp* *5*

M. C. *3*
la-tin-nus shines brigh-ter from Lu-cre-tia's fame.

The next significant addition to the motif occurs only seconds later. Immediately following Junius’s explosion, the Male Chorus again invokes the motif, heard in full this time, with the text “virtuous” (see fig. 4 above). This addition drives home Junius’s pairing, the words

“virtue” and “chastity” seeming nearly synonymous in the Roman perspective on women.¹⁰ These two occurrences, one directly after the other, work to guarantee that the audience understands these added connotations to the Lucretia motif.

The most significant revisitation of the motif in this scene comes quite some time later, after Collatinus has excused himself and left Tarquinius and Junius alone, free to discuss Lucretia with her husband no longer present. In fig. 5, we see the first occurrence of the motif in major, sung by Tarquinius, again to the word “virtuous.” This major mode is short-lived however, as Junius immediately corrects Tarquinius’s D sharp with his D natural—illustrating their direct disagreement on the subject of Lucretia. Tarquinius again, determinedly restates the motif in major, this time on the word “beautiful.” A new connotation for the motif, this occurrence begins to illustrate Tarquinius’s preoccupation with Lucretia, showing his unwelcome interest in her beauty. This major alteration again is corrected by Junius in his response, allowing his rebuttal again to be asserted over Tarquinius’s aims. One final time, Tarquinius sings the motif in major (see fig. 6 below), this time a semitone higher, his line attempting to rise above Junius’s

Fig. 5 (p.64-65 - Tarquinius, Junius)

The musical score for Figure 5 is set in G major and 4/4 time. It features two vocal parts: Tarquinius (Tenor) and Junius (Bass). The score is divided into three systems. In the first system, Tarquinius sings "But Lu - cre - tia's vir - tu - ous." with a *cresc.* marking and a triplet of eighth notes (D4, E4, F#4) over the word "vir-tu-ous." Junius responds with "cre - tia..." and then "Vir - tue in wo - men is a" with a *tranquillo* marking and a triplet of eighth notes (D4, E4, F4) over "Vir-tue". The second system shows Tarquinius singing "Lu - cre - tia's chaste as she is beau - ti - ful." with a *f agitato* marking and a triplet of eighth notes (D4, E4, F#4) over "beau-ti-ful." Junius responds with "lack of op - por - tu - ni - ty." and then "Wo - men are chaste when they're not temp - ted." with a *p* marking and a triplet of eighth notes (D4, E4, F4) over "Wo-men". The third system shows Junius continuing with "Lu - cre tia's beau - ti - ful but she's not chaste." with a *p* marking and a triplet of eighth notes (D4, E4, F4) over "beau-ti-ful". The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, dynamics, and performance instructions like *G.P.* (Grand Pause).

¹⁰ Even in the libretto itself, Duncan allows Junius to equate the two, giving him the line, “Virtue in women is a lack of opportunity... Women are chaste when they’re not tempted. Lucretia’s beautiful, but she’s not chaste. Women are all whores by nature.” It is, however, important to note that Junius is both speaking cynically here and functions as one of the opera’s antagonists, so Duncan, while setting up the equivalence of the terms, certainly doesn’t seem to agree with it. See Britten and Duncan, *The Rape of Lucretia*, 64-65.

Fig. 6 (p.66-67 - *Tarquinius, Junius*)

objections. Junius again disagrees, but enters on the D natural of before, not rising to Tarquinius’s challenge and correcting his E natural to an E flat. This undermines Junius’s disagreement and allows the argument to abate, leaving the motif uncorrected, left in major. This confrontation’s drama is heightened by Britten’s clever use of the motif, but carries a secondary goal: the final layer of meaning for the motif is established through Tarquinius’s text and the motif is codified—a sign for “Lucretia, the chaste, the virtuous, the *beautiful*.”¹¹

Untexted occurrences - *Early instances of the sign in action*

Throughout much of the same music discussed above, the motif appears in the orchestra as well as the voices. These instrumental appearances, though untexted, still carry the significance of the Lucretia motif, but are now able to underscore unassociated text, shading the audience’s perception of the drama as it occurs onstage. While these appearances are too many to name and discuss, I set out in this section to highlight a few pertinent examples, so as to illustrate how these untexted occurrences can shape the audiences understanding of the work.

In Junius’s extended monologue, dealing with his fear of the Roman people’s perceptions of him weakening and his self-proclaimed rival Collatinus’s success, the Lucretia motif sounds frequently underneath, tying his text about his waning fame to her.¹² In the context of the story this makes a great deal of sense. Junius has just found out his wife has made him a cuckold,

¹¹ I find it important to note that all three of these ideas conflated with Lucretia’s name are social constructed. Chastity, virtue, and beauty only have meaning within a given society. As an example, the “chastity” Junius and Tarquinius obsess over in Lucretia is an abstinence from extramarital relations, not a complete abstinence from sex. All three terms have less to do with what Lucretia is, and more to do with how she is perceived, especially by the operas antagonists.

¹² See Britten and Duncan, *The Rape of Lucretia*, 32-42.

while his only rival’s wife, Lucretia, has stayed faithful to her husband.¹³ When Junius exclaims “Now all of Rome Will laugh at me,” the woodwinds cackle the motif back at Junius, suggesting to the listener that Junius’s failings are Lucretia’s fault, not his own—or, at least, so Junius believes (see fig.7 below). This idea is reflected in the portion of the libretto that ends with fig. 3 above, “Collatinus will gain my fame with the Roman mob, Not because of battles he has won, but because Lucretia’s chaste, and the Romans being wanton worship chastity.”¹⁴ But that text doesn’t occur until after the appearance of the motif here (in fig.7), which leaves the audience responsible for understanding the implication of the motif’s presence, even before the text explains its presence.

Fig. 7 (p.34-35 - Junius, Flute, Oboe)

Fig. 8 (P.36-37 Male Chorus, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet)

¹³ Britten and Duncan, *The Rape of Lucretia*, 27-28. In this recitative, Tarquinius mocks Junius for his wife’s recent infidelity.

¹⁴ Britten and Duncan, *The Rape of Lucretia*, 39.

Another untexted occurrence, under the Male Chorus’s interjection into Junius’s monologue, further evidences Junius’s malice towards Lucretia for the audience. Seen in fig. 8 above, the woodwinds accompany the entirety of the passage, one after another sounding the quintuple figuration of the motif. Over top, the text “Oh, it is plain That nothing pleases Your friends so much As your dishonour” is sung, but the presence of the motif reminds the listener that Lucretia, not Collatinus or Tarquinius, is really the object of Junius’s ire. The pianissimo realization of the motif here adds a quality of taunting that wasn’t present in previous iterations, further lining up with the rest of Male Chorus’s text, where he suggests that the others are goading him intentionally.¹⁵ Junius’s ability to blame this on Lucretia, rather than on Tarquinius, as seen through the presence of the motif, shows the audience how far to anger Junius has actually been driven by his wife’s infidelity and Tarquinius’s mockery.

A third occurrence in the scene deals with the same attribution of Collatinus’s success to Lucretia’s chastity, but this time not from the perspective of Junius. Following the Male Chorus’s “Collatinus is politically astute to choose a virtuous wife” (as was seen in fig. 4), the Male Chorus asserts that Collatinus is “lucky”—an assertion immediately echoed by an appearance of the motif in first the clarinet, and then the flute (see fig. 9). The appearance of the motif ties Collatinus’s luck to Lucretia; Collatinus’s luck is not arbitrary, but rather the direct product of Lucretia and her virtue. Moreover, the double presentation of the motif allows the woodwinds to mimic the insistence in the text of the Male Chorus. The first of the two occurrences appears only mezzo forte, while the second, in the flute, appears both marked forte and an octave higher. This insistence demands that the audience understand: this “luck” is Lucretia.

Fig. 9 (p.40 - Male Chorus, Flute, Clarinet)

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Cl.), and Male Chorus (M. C.). The Flute part has a forte (f) dynamic and a quintuple motif marked with a '5'. The Clarinet part has a mezzo-forte (mf) dynamic and a similar quintuple motif. The Male Chorus part has a 'pium f' dynamic and lyrics: 'Col-la-ti-nus is luck-y, ve-ry luck - y...'. The score includes a 'lunga' marking above the final notes of each staff.

¹⁵ “Oh, it is plain That nothing pleases Your friends so much As your dishonour, For now they can Indulge in chatter And patronise you With their patter, And if by chance You lose your temper, They say they tease In all good humour.” See Britten and Duncan, *The Rape of Lucretia*, 36-38.

While the Lucretia motif, as a sign, is defined by the music of scene i discussed above, it continues to appear freely in both its texted and untexted forms, throughout the rest of Act I and in Act II, up through the scene of Lucretia's rape. Britten includes it at the end of the Male Chorus's Interlude, in an extended form—the last thing that the audience hears before moving into the scene where Lucretia is actually present for the first time.¹⁶ The motif appears several more times in the finale to the first act, always in Tarquinius's voice, as he bids Lucretia goodnight, after she allows him into her home.¹⁷ The occurrences in the beginning of the second act, appear in the scene of Lucretia's rape, again sung by Tarquinius.¹⁸ These are the last occurrences before the scene of the rape itself and Lucretia's "chastity" is stolen.¹⁹

Narrative implications on Lucretia's suicide

The use of this motif, codified into meaning as "Lucretia—the chaste, the virtuous, the beautiful," has continued to appear in its solidified quintuplet form, into and all the way through the scene in which Tarquinius rapes her. Knowing that this is a sign for Lucretia as chaste woman, we might expect the motif become warped, or even disappear, following Tarquinius's sexual assault. This is not what happens, however. In this section, I look at the occurrences of the Lucretia motif that follow the rape and offer what I consider a reasonable narrative for understanding these occurrences.

The first few of these occurrences, texted and untexted, support characters and text that are, as yet, unaware of the assault. The first, Lucia, Lucretia's maid, accompanies Lucia's musing on her mistress's beauty, "I often wonder whether Lucretia's love is the flower of her beauty, Or whether her loveliness is the flower of her love, For in her both love and beauty Are transform'd to grace." The motif appears here, first underscoring the latter half of this line, in the harp part, but eventually Lucia joins in on the distinctive quintuplets on the word "transformed" (see fig. 10). While Britten may be implying a different, darker, transformation, the fact remains that both Lucia's text and use of the motive are uninformed of the rape; and so this instance offers no proof that the motif, a symbol of chastity, will survive the revelation of the rape.

¹⁶ See Britten and Duncan. *The Rape of Lucretia*, 89.

¹⁷ Britten and Duncan, *The Rape of Lucretia*, 154-156.

¹⁸ Britten and Duncan, *The Rape of Lucretia*, 209.

¹⁹ This construct of "stolen chastity" is obviously simply that, a construct. It is, however, a common theme in both Roman literature and its reconstructions, and an important facet of this retelling, fundamental for understanding the character of Lucretia and her motivations. More on this in the following section.

Fig. 10 (p.263-264 - Lucia, Harp)

The musical score for Lucia and Harp (Hp.) consists of two systems. The first system shows the harp accompaniment (Hp.) and Lucia's vocal line. The harp part features a prominent 5:3 interval motif, which is repeated throughout the piece. The lyrics are: "For in her both love and beauty". The second system continues the harp accompaniment and Lucia's vocal line. The harp part features a prominent 5:3 interval motif, which is repeated throughout the piece. The lyrics are: "are transform'd to grace."

The next appearance of the motif occurs at the end of Lucretia’s famous aria, “Give him this orchid.” This iteration takes all of the previously held associations that the audience has with the Lucretia motif and twists them to bitter irony. Throughout the aria, Lucretia is asking Lucia to send a message to Collatinus, but constantly refers to her perceived loss of chastity, her “shame,” although she has not yet admitted the rape. She says to Lucia, “tell [Collatinus] a Roman harlot sent it” and further to “tell the messenger to take my love... give my love to the messenger,” and continuing on, expounding on her perceived immorality. So, when she finishes with the following (**fig. 11**),

The musical score for Lucretia (L'tia) shows her vocal line. The lyrics are: "For all men love the chaste Lucretia!"

(p.271-272 - Lucretia)

Lucretia’s one and only use of the motif—the irony is heartbreaking. It would be very easy to imagine this, then, as the death of the Lucretia motif—for what possible recovery could the motif

have from the negation of everything that it has signified, in the voice of the character whom it is supposed to represent?

And yet, the Lucretia motif continues to appear as we progress through the opera, twice more before Lucretia's public admission of the rape. The next occurrence, which underscores Bianca, her elderly nurse, as she remembers Lucretia in her youth, sees the motif transformed to major (see fig. 12). Furthermore, the motif has been rhythmically normalized, having lost its quintuple rhythm in favor of a more typical eighth note rhythm, fitting cleanly into the 6/8 metrical scheme. It appears in the violin part, high, muted, spiccato, and rather quickly. All of these factors lead the motif to sound youthful and full of mirth, distinctly unlike all of its former occurrences. This allows the motif to underscore Bianca's reminiscence, recalling the Lucretia motif, but in a happier, simpler form, to pair with Lucretia's happier, simpler days.

Fig. 12 (p.277 - Bianca, Violin I)

The image shows a musical score for Bianca on page 277. The top staff is for Bianca, with a treble clef, key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The music is marked *sempre pp e legato*. The lyrics are "I re-mem-ber when her hair fell like a". The bottom staff is for Violin I (Vln. I), with a treble clef, key signature of one sharp, and a 6/8 time signature. The music is marked *con sord.* and *pp sempre spicc.*. The violin part features a rhythmic motif of eighth notes, which is a transformed version of the Lucretia motif.

The final appearance of the motif before Lucretia discloses the truth about the rape comes after Collatinus arrives back at their home. Seeing Lucretia distraught, but not yet knowing why, Collatinus sings the motif, saying the following (fig. 13):

The image shows a musical score for Collatinus on page 284. The top staff is for Collatinus (C. A.), with a treble clef, key signature of two sharps (F# and C#), and a 2/4 time signature. The music is marked *ppp*. The bottom staff is for Collatinus (Col.), with a bass clef, key signature of two sharps, and a 2/4 time signature. The music is marked *pppp* and *ppp*. The lyrics are "Lu-cre-tia! Lu-cre-tia! O, ne-ver a-gain must we two dare to part." The English Horn part features a rhythmic motif of eighth notes, which is a transformed version of the Lucretia motif.

(p.284 - Collatinus, English Horn)

The motif occurs here, again rhythmically altered, but returned to the minor mode and its original key, and preserved exactly intervallically in both of the occurrences in the English horn, only altered directly at the end in Collatinus's line. This restoration of the motif directly

living with the rape.²² This idea of absolving rape through death has also been clearly present within the opera libretto itself, leading up to this point. In the interlude following Lucretia's rape, the Male and Female Chorus together exclaim, "Nothing impure survives, All passion perishes, Virtue has one desire To let its blood flow Back to the wounds of Christ."²³ Even in the moment of the suicide, Lucretia's own dying words echo this idea: "Now I'll be forever chaste, with only death to ravish me. See, how my wanton blood Washes my shame away!"²⁴

If death truly offers absolution, we would expect, following Lucretia's suicide, the Lucretia motif to transcend its original form, or at least be restored to it. However, this is not what happens.

Following her suicide, Lucretia motif appears only in the voice of an antagonist: Junius, who uses Lucretia's death to forward his political agenda (**fig. 15**):²⁵

The image shows a musical score for Junius in bass clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The first staff is marked "Junius" and "sempre marcatis." The lyrics are "Here lies the chaste Lu - cre - tia... dead, and by Tar - qui - nius". The second staff is marked "Junius" and "ff pesante". The lyrics are "ra-vish-ed. Now let her bo-dy be borne... thro' our ci-ty". The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and a triplet of eighth notes.

Fig. 15 (p.296-297 - Junius)

²² William Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus* (London: Routledge, 1995). "Die, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee,/ And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die." Shakespeare also makes reference to another story of Livy's in this scene, that of Virginia (sometimes Verginia, or in latin, Uerginia), where her father, Virginius, kills her to prevent her rape, "In this one way, the only one in my power, do I secure you your liberty." See Livy. *Ab Urbe Condita, Book 3, section 48, line 5*.

²³ See Britten and Duncan, *The Rape of Lucretia*, 227-229. The Christian imagery here is not atypical for Male and Female Chorus in this work. Duncan's libretto clearly establishes the these two characters as onlookers from a later time, with foreknowledge of future history, and their own biases about it.

²⁴ See Britten and Duncan. *The Rape of Lucretia*, 292-293.

²⁵ The Junius of this story is Lucius Junius Brutus, the founder of the Roman Republic. According to Livy, Junius paraded Lucretia's dead body through the streets of Rome, inciting the Roman mob to revolt against Tarquinius's father, Tarquinius Superbus. This revolt drove the Etruscan royals from Roman capital and led directly to the founding of the Republic. See Livy, *History of Rome, Vol. 1, Books 1-2*, trans. Benjamin Oliver Foster (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1919).

No other character ever sings the motif again, or even says Lucretia's name. In the voices of her loved ones, Collatinus and her servants, the absence of the motif shows Lucretia not restored, but rather, lost. This is the power of Britten's motivic writing. Through the sudden disappearance of the ever-present motif we too feel the disappearance of Lucretia alongside those who loved her. Lucretia is lost to us all—not in rape, but in death.

Conclusions

Britten forms a sign in the Lucretia motif that carries meaning to the audience. The texted occurrences of the motif create a layered semantic meaning that can be recalled in the listener through the use of exact quotation of the motif, or through variation of it, using either its distinctive rhythm or its easily recalled intervallic qualities. The appearances, texted and untexted, contribute to the listener's understanding of the text and the drama, fundamentally impacting the audience's interpretation of the story.

Britten's use of the motif after Lucretia's rape is an especially significant example of the potential impact a musical sign can have on the perception of a dramatic work. The presence of the motif after the rape and, moreover, after Lucretia's confession of the rape, shows the audience that Lucretia is fundamentally unchanged by the rape, at least in the minds of those who love her. The motif's absence then, from the music that follows her death supports a narrative that disagrees with the idea of "absolution through death:" a narrative that asks the audience to seek a better way.

Lastly, this narrative understanding of Lucretia's death comes not from the text alone, but rather from the combination of text and music. Britten's musical setting of Ronald Duncan's libretto not only comments upon the text, but fundamentally changes its meaning. Then, to fully understand Britten's opera requires not only a musical or textual analysis, but rather both in combination—texted narrative musical analysis.

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