

In Britten's opera *The Rape of Lucretia* the choruses tell us that Rome had sunk into depravity and reveal their views of events to be that of a later Christian era. You can see how the story of Lucretia told in Latin by Ovid links to today by being re-told in our own era. (1)

The storyline of the opera is very like Ovid's version. It nearly exactly follows Ovid's story and the events leading up to the rape and suicide of Lucretia. In the opera Tarquinius is drinking with friends and they decide to see what their wives were doing. Only Lucretia is not betraying her husband. She was spinning wool with her maidservants. Tarquinius is dared by Junius to try to seduce Lucretia and he gallops off. In Ovid's version Tarquinius decides for himself. *ardet et iniusti stimulis agitatur amoris comparat indigno vimque dolumque toro*, (Fasti 2.779-780) (2) and goes to her house where Lucretia is patiently spinning wool with her servants and thinking of her absent husband. As the women prepare for bed there is a knock at the door. Lucretia cannot refuse to offer Tarquinius hospitality. He goes to her room at night and rapes her. (3)

In the opera, Bianca (Lucretia's nurse here, but not mentioned by Ovid) the next morning after the rape when Lucretia asked for a messenger to send for Collatinus her husband, tried to stop the messenger. There is no reference to this occurring in Ovid's story. In Ovid's description it is said that she also sends for her father (815-816). (4) "She summoned her aged father together with her faithful husband from the camp" (5) but there is no mention of this either in the opera. When Collatinus receives the message he comes to her straightaway in both the opera and Ovid's version.

But in the opera he brings Junius Brutus. (6) In Ovid's description Brutus suddenly appears at the death scene (line 837). "Brutus was there." He plans to use this crime to spark a rebellion. (7) Despite minor differences, no doubt to adapt to the modern age Britten's work remains remarkably similar to Ovid's.