

The Rape of Lucretia by Benjamin Britten

The choir that narrates the opera tells the story from a Christian perspective. The idea of interpreting a story that happened about half a millennium before Christ was born is an interesting take on the story. In the second scene of Act Two **Lucretia refuses Collatinus' forgiveness and commits suicide, (1) "quam" dixit "veniam datis, ipsa nego" nec mora: celato fixit sua pectora ferro.** (2) **"I refuse the pardon that you give me" she said. With no delay she pierced her breast with the sword that she had concealed."**(Fasti 2, 830-831). (3)

The fact that Collatinus was willing to forgive Lucretia for the deed (4) *dant veniam facto genitor coniunxque coacto* (Fasti 2, 829) (5) is a very Christian act as forgiveness is very important in their religion. However Lucretia refuses Collatinus' forgiveness. **This shows the contrast between the concept of forgiveness in Christianity and the Roman concept of retaining honour in death. This provides a link between the past and the present for the audience in this opera. (6)**

When Tarquinius is trying to seduce Lucretia he starts gently by urging and pleading before arguing with her, finally drawing his sword and raping her. (7) These events are mentioned in Ovid's telling of the story although in a different order. Tarquinius drew his sword as an immediate threat in order to intimidate Lucretia. Then he begged, tried to bribe her with gifts and threatened her. **"Neither by prayer, nor gifts nor threats did he move her" (Fasti 2.806).** (8) There is no mention in the opera of the blackmail that Tarquinius finally used to overcome her. He threatened to say that Lucretia had committed adultery with a slave whom he had killed. This was too much for Lucretia and she yielded.