

Introduction

I Lucretia

This book emerges from a contemplation of the temporal and conceptual distance between two discreet moments in time: Hillary Clinton's candidacy for the US presidency in 2008 and the rape of Lucretia by the tyrant Collantine in Rome, Italy in 510 BCE.

The first: May 3, 2008, Mai Fest, Covington, Kentucky. The Saturday before the Bluegrass State's presidential primary, Hillary Clinton, the first serious female contender for the presidency in American history, arrived at Covington's annual spring festival to address a small but excited crowd. She walked quietly out of the front door of the local courthouse and stood smiling as a glad cheer rose. She spoke for roughly twenty minutes and then stepped forward to clasp hands and pose for pictures with the women pushing strollers and wheelchairs, the men balancing small children on their shoulders.

As political theater goes, it was remarkably humble. It was of course theater. A multimillionaire, Hillary Clinton was expensively turned out. As the former First Lady, a then-sitting member of the U.S. Senate and later Secretary of State, she had long enjoyed serious power over people's lives and by all accounts, had few qualms about wielding it. But as someone who has studied the court masques and royal coronations of monarchical days gone by, I was still struck by the modest and gritty scale of the process by which leaders are chosen in the American republic and could not help but recall a passage from John Milton's *Ready and Easie Way to Establish a Commonwealth*. Written in 1660 on the eve of the restoration of Charles II, Milton still hoped to persuade his

countrymen to build a “free Commonwealth” wherein “they who are greatest, are perpetual servants and drudges to the publick at thir own cost and charges, neglect thir own affairs; yet are not elevated above thir brethren, live soberly in thir families, walk the streets as other men, may be spoken to freely, familiarly, friendly, without adoration.”¹ Clinton’s intimate interactions with this small group of Kentuckians on the sidewalk in front of the little courthouse on this warm evening in May seemed to fulfill the plain-style nature of Milton’s republican vision.

But of course, at no point in *The Readie and Easie Way* – or any of his writings – did Milton ever refer to a republican governor as a “she.” Quite the contrary as is well known. Even as he demystified single person rule, he still privileged men over women when it came to the investiture of political authority: “For the ground and basis of every just and free government (since men have smarted so oft for committing all to one person) is a general Council of ablest men, chosen by the people to consult of publick affairs from time to time for the common good.”² And of course, Milton was no exception to the general rule of republican philosophy regarding the “woman question.” In *The Six Books of the Republic* (1576), the an antirepublican monarchist, Jean Bodin provided an early version of what would become the most cited argument against female political power in the republic: The household was a microcosm of the state and so, just as the government should be ruled by the husband-father of the body politic, the home should be ruled by the man. In this respect, republicanism remained true to rather than rebellious against one of the basic tenets of monarchy.³ And yet, there *she* – Hillary Clinton – stood, the former First Lady who had transmogrified into an influential senator from New York, a Secretary of State and a heavyweight competitor for the most powerful position in America, a belated would-be follower even in the footsteps of women who had headed other modern republics – Indira Ghandi, Benazir Bhutto, Margaret Thatcher, Corazon Aquino, Angela Merkel – and a runner-up in her own country to Sarah Palin, the governor of Alaska who won the Republican nomination to run as Vice President and who was a political descendant of Geraldine Ferraro, the first woman to be nominated by a major party to the Vice Presidency.

¹ John Milton, “The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth,” in Roy Flanagan, ed., *The Riverside Milton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), pp. 1134–1149; quote from p. 1139.

² *Ibid.*, p. 1141.

³ Jean Bodin, *The Six Books of the Republic* (1576), Chapters II–V, www.constitution.org/bodin/bodin...htm.

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And while, as noted, Clinton became Secretary of State, she was not the first woman to serve in that capacity, having been preceded in the post by Madeleine Albright and Condoleezza Rice. To return, it may be surmised then that Bodin opposed republicanism precisely because it did not confine women to the home.

Which leads to scenario number two.

Rome, Italy, ca. 510 BCE Prince Sextus Tarquinius lounged in his tent after a day of besieging Ardea in search of the wealth his father needed to fuel his lavish spending and appease his resentful subjects.⁴ The Prince sparred with his men over whose wife was most virtuous. Collatinus asserted that, if they would ride to Rome to observe their wives, they would see that his Lucretia was the most chaste. Collatinus's boast proved true: As the other men's wives were out carousing, Lucretia was at home, sewing with her maids. Besotted, Sextus Tarquinius determined to possess her for himself. Later that night, he took an attendant to Lucretia's house, where they were graciously welcomed. After the household went to bed, he snuck into Lucretia's chamber and threatened to kill her if she did not submit. Fearing for her reputation more than her life, Lucretia resisted and so was told that, not only would she die, but a dead slave would be placed beside her in a compromising position. Still refusing, she was raped. The next day, she called for her father and husband. Her father, Spurius Lucretius, arrived from Rome with Publius Valerius while her husband rushed from Ardea with Lucius Junius Brutus by his side. She informed them of what passed and despaired that, as a woman, she was worthless without her honor and deserved to die. The men vowed to avenge her and passionately tried to convince her that, because she was innocent, she should live. She disagreed, declaring, "though I acquit myself of the sin, I do not absolve myself from punishment; nor in time to come shall ever unchaste woman live through the example of Lucretia."⁵ She then stabbed herself. As all mourned, the normally feckless Brutus retrieved the knife, held it aloft, and swore revenge. Inspired, his countrymen sided with him. Lucretia's body was carried to the marketplace where it attracted large crowds who also inveighed against the king. Brutus berated them to dry their tears and take up the sword, "as befitted men and Romans, against those who had dared to treat them as enemies." At the Forum, Brutus ignited further rebellion by recounting the rape of Lucretia. A large army

⁴ Titus Livius Patavinus [Livy], *Ab Urbe Condita Libri*, or *The History of Rome, Books I and II with an English Translation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), Book I, Sections 57–60.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

formed and marched with him to Ardea where they convinced the rest of the king's troops to join them. United, they liberated Rome and exiled the royal family. More than two hundred years of monarchy ended and Rome became a republic.

As the theory goes, my second scenario, should render my first impossible. That is, the particular nature of Lucretia's role in overthrowing monarchy and replacing it with a republic should prohibit women who live within republican orders from participating in the public sphere altogether, including, of course, the realm of government. As feminist scholars point out, there is no shortage of male republican thinkers who aimed at "the political and legal exclusion of women from modern democracy."⁶ As a result, writes Judith Vega, "Republicanism thus seems to epitomize the quintessence of a disciplining and masculinist modernity," the "validation of an egocentric, competing, controlling political epistemological subject, both steeped in an undisguised fear of and contempt for women."⁷ A recent version of this reasoning contends that republicanism's classical originators encoded this misogyny. Because Brutus and his fellows were motivated to establish the Roman republic by Lucretia's rape and suicide, a fatal shadow was cast over republicanism's long-term potential for female agency and worth. As Stephanie Jed argues, the circumstances of Lucretia's role in the formation of the republic doom republican women to functioning only as the "pharmakon" or scapegoat – the victim whose postviolation monstrosity incites her brethren to seek mastery by deploying the specter of her violated body as a standard for their own attempts to become "citizens" rather than "subjects." Her victimization is a catalyst for their desire to erect and rule the republic but her participation ends there. She was important not for what she said or did to actively create and recreate the republic, but for what she nullified in herself to provide the combat motivation for those who would bring the republic into existence. Therefore, just as it's the pharmakon's role to continually define the line between the profane and the sacred, the monstrous and the divine, women in the republic are relegated to guarding the divide between the virtuous private domestic sphere and the public sphere of the state. As Melissa Matthes sums it up, Lucretia made possible "a moment of history" but was then necessarily "neglected

⁶ Catherine Larrere, "Women, Republicanism, and the Growth of Commerce," in Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 139–156; quote from p. 139.

⁷ Judith A. Vega, "Feminist Republicanism and the Political Perception of Gender," *ibid.*, 157–174; quote from p. 158.

and forgotten.”⁸ Because “Lucretia’s [rape and] suicide were the material from which republican citizenship was fashioned,” then “women’s role in the future republic” would be that of “silent signifiers who are the carriers of cultural value” but not “makers of it.”⁹

Given these formulations, it is no wonder that *Perspectives on English Revolutionary Republicanism*, an outstanding collection of essays published as recently as 2014 and designed to “paint a lively picture of the state of the art in republican scholarship,” contains little work on women writers.¹⁰ Or that, even as Annabel Patterson argues that various representations of the “family tragedy” that accompanied the classical rendering of Tarquin’s rape of Lucretia functioned “as a cause in the long history of republican thought and action,” no such representations by English women writers are included in that long history.¹¹ And yet, as Vega herself observes, the sweeping characterizations by Jed and Matthes that are summarized above beg the question as to how, over time and with only a few exceptions, even as women have become fully enfranchised members of republican orders and have even been able to make their way into positions of power within some of the world’s mightiest examples. In other words, there still exists a powerful assumption that women did not help to construct something like an “English Revolutionary Republicanism” because they simply could not have.¹²

This study seeks to redress that assumption by analyzing the ways in which the seventeenth-century English women writers Eleanor Davies, Brilliana Harley, Anne Bradstreet, Isabella Twysden, Anne Venn, and Lucy Hutchinson confirm Jonathan Scott’s assertion that, “there remains a striking disjuncture between the high profile of republicanism as a component of the history of ideas, and the historiographical place occupied by the republican experiment in practice.”¹³ Scott does not say as much but I would argue that exploring this disjunction in the context of the

⁸ Stephanie Jed, *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucretia and the Birth of Humanism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989); Melissa Matthes, *The Rape of Lucretia and the Founding of Republics* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2000), p. 44.

⁹ Matthes, p. 35.

¹⁰ Dirk Wiemann and Gaby Mahlberg, eds., *Perspectives on English Revolutionary Republicanism* (London: Ashgate, 2014), p. 2.

¹¹ Annabel Patterson, *Reading between the Lines* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 304.

¹² Vega, p. 12.

¹³ Jonathan Scott, *Commonwealth Principles: Republican Writings of the English Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 12.

relationship between womanhood and the English republic exposes not only a gap between theory and practice but also, as his highly nuanced formulation suggests, a gap between republicanism's reputation or "high profile" in the history of ideas and its most radical implications. To illustrate, I offer a brief case study of Oliver Cromwell's wife, Elizabeth. Elizabeth Cromwell was England's first "first lady" so to speak and so one would imagine that a study seeking to overturn the perception that a republic is identifiable as such when its women are invisible would be able to offer a celebratory recovery of her forgotten prominence. This study can not do so but the reasons for that illustrate precisely why Elizabeth Cromwell represents such a powerful and instructive example of how problematic the relationship is between republicanism's "image" in modern theory and its practical instantiations in history. Indeed, as Elizabeth Cromwell's story unfolds, it will actually come to affirm the central premise of this book, that the moral domain for republicanism – that is the site of political virtue in the resisting conscience – is invariably female. It is the tyrant's confrontation with and denial of the inviolability and absolute inalienability of that space which defines him as a tyrant for it demarcates the already established, fully articulated republic within the "secret place" or ontological "chastity" of the individual's heart.

II Theory versus Practice: The Case of Elizabeth Cromwell

In the course of documenting the extensive life and times of Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of the Interregnum Protectorate, historians have expressed a mild frustration with the lack of information available about his wife. They report that Elizabeth married Oliver in 1620 at St. Giles Cripplegate, that she was the daughter of Sir James Bouchier, a knighted fur-dealer and leather dresser, and that her marriage to Cromwell brought the future leader into alliance with those who would become power-brokers of the Parliamentary opposition to Charles I during the Civil wars.¹⁴ A miniature of the Protectress by Samuel Cooper shows a woman who was "neither uncomely nor undignified in person" and Elizabeth is said to have provided her husband with the "benefit of the bed" by bearing him nine children.¹⁵ The six who survived included

¹⁴ F. J. Routledge and Sir Charles Firth, eds., *Calendar of the Clarendon State Papers*, Vol. IV, 1657–1660 (Oxford, 1932).

¹⁵ Charles Firth, *Oliver Cromwell and the Rule of the Puritans in England* (New York: G. P. Putnam's, 1900), p. 8; Maurice Ashley, *Charles I and Oliver Cromwell* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 28.

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four daughters and two sons – one of whom, Richard, briefly became the head of state after Oliver’s death in 1658. Other than minor attention to such basic details, discussions of Elizabeth Cromwell remain elusive. The assumption is that Elizabeth Cromwell remains a “shadowy figure” because her “heavy-footed” and “dull and tranquil” character prevented her from impacting the Protectorate in the same way that “the trim French Queen,” Henrietta Maria, defined – for better or for worst – Charles I’s court.¹⁶ Today’s assumption would be that Elizabeth’s obscurity is a product of her plight as England’s first republican first lady – consigned to invisibility within the newly formed private sphere of the home. But I suggest that Elizabeth Cromwell’s anonymity was neither a product of her lack of personal charisma nor an instantiation of republicanism’s alleged theoretical desire to efface representations of women from public power. Rather it is a function of the desire of republicanism in its most purely theoretical and idealized form to erase representations of *any* individual – male or female – from public power.

Early modern monarchs depended upon cults of personality for maintaining political power over the lives of their subjects and Charles I was no exception; indeed he went to great lengths, even by the standards of his predecessors, to carefully craft idealized representations of himself as a doting father and husband to his pretty wife and their numerous children. These modes of “representative publicity” were intended to suggest that Charles was as devoted a husband and father to his subjects as he was his family.¹⁷ However, the increasingly aggressive and extravagant means by which this propaganda was staged by Charles and his image-makers produced the opposite effect, suggesting that Charles cared far more for his family than he did his people and thereby fostering and clarifying republican critiques.¹⁸ Charles’s extremism revealed the latent narcissism of monarchy: Kings were inherently more devoted to their own private dynastic interests than they were committed to the public good as it was associated with the ancient rights of Parliament and the polity it represented. Charles’s investment in simultaneously replicating his power through the production of heirs and maintaining control over the “private” lives of his subjects meant that, if the excessive devotion he showed to his family *was* analogous to his love for his people, it was

¹⁶ C. V. Wedgwood, *Oliver Cromwell* (London: Duckworth, 1973), p. 89.

¹⁷ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 7, 8.

¹⁸ David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 115–116.

because that love took the form of a suffocating paternalism that enabled him to rationalize his rapacious trampling of Parliamentary prerogatives and his intrusion into nonstatist public or social spheres (such as the Church) that many (increasingly) believed should be protected from Crown oversight.

Republicanism at this time was not necessarily equated with Spartanism; for instance, the Court of the Dutch Republic and the Doge of Venice were renowned for their formality.¹⁹ However, in English circles, iconoclastic republican critiques of unlimited monarchy joined with Puritan critiques of Catholicism's emphasis upon the mystification of power through elaborate spectacle to conclude that the size and scope of Charles's I lavish court and the preeminence of his family in its self-elaborations, including his French Catholic Queen Henrietta Maria's rich displays of her "papisty," signified how the king had completely overridden any distinction between the state, or "*polis*," and the household, or "*oikos*," and descended into arbitrary rule over the private lives and consciences of his subjects – that is, into tyranny.²⁰ The cult of Charles and Henrietta reached its apex in masques such as Thomas Carew's *Coelum Britannicum* (1634) where, in the "revelatory" climax, both Charles and Henrietta Maria were actively deified as conjoined "twins" – "CARLOMARIA" – who ruled as gods in tandem.²¹ Such acts of extreme Stuart self-aggrandizement led Milton to constitute the royal marriage as an especially potent emblem for the Carolinian paradox: Charles was on the one hand "in bed with the Catholic church" and thus neglectful of his Protestant subjects and yet on the other hand so wedded to his people that he could never allow them any religious "separatism," forcing them into an unwanted "marriage" with an outlawed faith. Charles's "superstition" in religion, Milton argued, had issued "from his own House" and thus he must take the blame for the resulting "miscarriages in State, his proper sphere."²² Charles's insistence upon grandiose acts of self-deification and the heavy-handed wielding of power that accompanied them also led Milton to anatomize its result in elaborate bureaucracies whose economic and social toll were as costly and tyrannical as religious

¹⁹ Wedgwood, p. 85.

²⁰ Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 122.

²¹ Thomas Carew, "Coelum Britannicum," in David Lindley, Michael Cordner, Peter Holland, and Martin Wiggins, eds., *Court Masques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 166–193; quote from p. 172.

²² John Milton, "Eikonoklastes," in Flanagan, ed. *The Riverside Milton*, pp. 1076–1095; quote from p. 1084.

overreach: When “a king must be ador’d like a Demigod, with a dissolute and haughtie court about him,” not to mention, “a queen” (“in most likelihood outlandish and a Papist”), a “queen mother,” and all their “numerous issue,” then the people must both incur the “vast expense and luxury” of their “masques, and revels,” “their sumptuous courts,” their “servile crew, not of servants only, but of nobility and gentry,” and their “court offices,” and they must endure their own corruption by the court’s contagious “debauching of our prime gentry, both male and female”²³

In this context, Elizabeth Cromwell’s relative absence from republican discourses become intelligible as the product of something other than her own (lack of) personality or even republicanism’s hostility to “public” women. Indeed, while it has been argued that republicanism was a reaction’s against monarchy’s enablement of public power for (aristocratic) women in general, I assert that Elizabeth Cromwell’s obscurity can be read as a sign of how threatening republicanism was precisely because its attempts to limit or eliminate the size and power of the court coincided with a desire to maximize the power and function of private spheres in ways that rendered women more visible rather than less.²⁴ In keeping with republicanism’s ideal of refusing to embody rule in particular individuals rather than in the higher rule of law as it was said to guard the people’s rights, Cromwell *herself* was elided from texts that praised the new Commonwealth. Weary and critical of Carolinian self-deification via cults of personality and family, early Commonwealth texts celebrated what they believed constituted the more proper foundations of a just and sustainable order. For instance, *A Panegyrick* (1647) attributes the success of the republican revolution to the, “Most gracious, Omnipotent, / And everlasting Parliament, / Whose power and Majestie / Is greater then all Kings by odds.”²⁵ Other texts, such as George Wither’s *The British Appeals* (1649), establish the absence of the leader and his family from the new panegyric as an explicit mainstay of republicanism’s claim to proper rule.²⁶ Addressed to “The Sovereigne Majesty of the Parliament

²³ John Milton, “The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth,” in Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, eds., *John Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 308–329; quote from p. 336.

²⁴ Marion Wynne Davies, “The Queen’s Masque: Renaissance Women and the Seventeenth-Century Court Masque,” in S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies, eds., *Gloriana’s Face: Women, Public and Private, in the English Renaissance* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1992), pp. 79–104.

²⁵ Anon., *A Panegyrick, Faithfully representing the proceedings of the Parliament at Westminster* (London, 1647), p. 1.

²⁶ George Wither, *The British Appeals* (London: 1649).

of the English Republike,” the poem alludes to *Coelum Britannicum* by noting that it was “Flattering Priests and Poets” who “urged [Charles] on” to greater and greater degrees of absolutist pretension until “by the last, He and his Queen became / So often represented by the name / Of Heath'nish Deities.”²⁷ The implication is that the very presence of *either* the republican leader or his wife, much less both, within Wither’s lyric would have signified the poet’s deification of yet another regime that empowered rulers rather than the people.

Cromwell himself became more and more visible as the Commonwealth strayed further and further from the republican ideal. In 1653, *The Instrument of Power* formulated England as a Protectorate. While Cromwell refused the Crown under this new order, and while the *Instrument* protected some religious rights and provided for some separation of powers, it was received by hard-line republicans as “monarchy bottomed by the sword.”²⁸ Analogously, poets began to “Cromwellianize” English republicanism by inserting Cromwell himself into their panegyrics and even more problematically, likening him to Caesar.²⁹ To compensate for the fact that the Roman historical Caesar had forsaken the Spartanism idealized by Roman republicans and succumbed to the allures of princely life, Cromwellianizing republicans retained some vestiges of Cromwell as a delimited leader by continuing their refusal to surround him with the distracting trappings of a court, including a glorified queen and heirs. In *Radius Heliconicus*, R. Fletcher contends that Cromwell, like Caesar, was and should be a “small” “basis” upon which to “raise our Fame’s encomion.”³⁰ Thus, Fletcher follows in Wither’s footsteps by drawing the line at “worshiping” anyone as a “Meteor or a Star.”³¹ Thomas Manley’s *Veni; Vidi; Vici* acknowledges that, “As Caesars conquests did his honor raise, / And crown his temples with Imperiall bayes; So did his treacherous dealing merit shame, And mixe dishonor with so great a fame.”³² However, Manley assures his readers that England’s new champion can retain the imperial prowess of his Roman predecessor without falling prey to the temptations of extravagance: “But YOU Great, Sir, Greater than Caesar are, / The Empire of Your Vertues reacheth far, . . . / At hopes of Lucre you unmoved stand, / No wretched gold thy spirit can command . . . / For

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁸ Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed, Britain 1603–1714* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 206–207.

²⁹ Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, pp. 228–42.

³⁰ R. Fletcher, *Radius Heliconicus: or, The Resolution of a Free State* (London, 1651), p. 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Thomas Manley, *Veni; Vidi; Vici. The Triumphs of the Most Excellent & Illustrious Oliver Cromwell* (London, 1652), p. 71.