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Abstract:

There are no words that encapsulate the idea of the heroic rapist better than the ones used by Susan Brownmiller in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. She writes: "As man conquers the world, so too he conquers the female." Throughout history no theme rules the masculine imagination more often and with less honor than the myth of the heroic rapist. In Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Niccolò Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*, fortune is always seen from a male point of view. The term fortune, meaning chance or luck as an external or arbitrary force affecting human affairs, is often used in these works yet neither Angelica nor Lucrezia—the two principal female characters—is able to control her own destiny. Each woman's life, and its set course, is controlled by feelings of weakness, fear and intimidation that stem from being seen, not as a woman, but as an object to be possessed. Objectification, a notion central to feminist theory, has been roughly defined as the perceiving and/or treating a person, almost always a woman, as an object. For Angelica and Lucrezia, it is the result of sexual objectification that terrorizes and objectifies them. The objectification of these two women and how that sustains the privilege and power of the heroic rapist is what this article examines. It arrives at this conclusion through the exploration of renaissance gender roles and how each group uses its available resources in an attempt to better its situation. It also documents how the literature serves to perpetuate and decimate these defined roles in popular culture.

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Against their Will: Deconstructing the Myth of the Heroic Rapist in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*

SCOTT NELSON

There are no words that encapsulate the idea of the heroic rapist better than the ones used by Susan Brownmiller in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. She writes: "As man conquers the world, so too he conquers the female."¹ Throughout history no theme rules the masculine imagination more often and with less honor than the myth of the heroic rapist.² In Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Niccolò Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*, fortune is always seen from a male point of view. The term fortune, meaning chance or luck as an external or arbitrary force affecting human affairs, is often used in these works yet neither Angelica nor Lucrezia—the two principal female characters—is able to control her own destiny. Each woman's life, and its set course, is controlled by feelings of weakness, fear, and intimidation that stem from being seen, not as a woman, but as an object to be possessed. Objectification, a notion central to feminist theory, has been roughly defined as the perceiving and/or treating a person, almost always a woman, as an object.³ For Angelica and Lucrezia, it is the result of sexual objectification that terrorizes and objectifies them. The objectification of these two women and how that sustains the privilege and power of the heroic rapist is what this article examines. It arrives at this conclusion through the exploration of Renaissance gender roles and how each group uses its available resources in an attempt to better its situation. It also documents how the literature served to perpetuate and disseminate these defined roles in popular culture.

Angelica and Lucrezia suffer the bulk of the objectification in *Orlando Furioso* and *La Mandragola* as each woman is a prize to be conquered and won. Her personal situation is defined by the result of a man's fortune—for good or bad—and by the determination of his will. The principle function of Angelica in *Orlando Furioso* is to provoke the "pazzia" of Orlando.⁴ This statement underscores the lack of power that Angelica has over her own situation. Her main function is simply to provoke the men who want her. For Lucrezia, in *La Mandragola*, her role is essentially the same. It is her sole purpose to provoke the "pazzia" of Callimaco, who would have undoubtedly ended up like Orlando were he not able to fulfill his sexual desires with Lucrezia. These women are continually left waiting to find out what their fate will be because they have no meaningful say in the matter. Their options are only to submit or resist, never to instigate.

During the Renaissance men had a near monopoly on the development of ideas pertaining to love and manners. These ideas were designed to serve the interest of husbands and male-dominated groups, resulting in the removal of women from any "unladylike"—meaning outside of the home—position of power or erotic independence.⁵ When looking at how Western Europeans regarded a woman ruler during this time period, it is clear that women had little opportunity to gain power. While male rule was viewed as orderly, legitimate, and correct, female rule was perceived as disorderly, illegitimate, and dangerous. Women rulers, whose accession to power always took place due to the lack of a legitimate male heir, were seen as a threat to the natural and social order. While

¹ Susan Brownmiller, *Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975), 289.

² Ibid.

³ Evangelia Papadaki, "Feminist Perspectives on Objectification," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2012). <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/feminism-objectification>

⁴ Mario Santoro, *L'anello di Angelica: nuovi saggi ariosteschi* (Napoli: Federico & Ardia, 1983), 63.

⁵ Joan Kelly-Gadol, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1977), 197.

men within the public sphere were typically honored and respected, to be designated a “public woman” was essentially to be called a whore.⁶

The fear of powerful women was widespread in the political rhetoric concerning the exercise of legitimate political power and authority prior to and during the Renaissance.⁷ This, perhaps, is why Joan Kelly-Gadol argued that upper class Italian women did not experience a renaissance of their own.⁸ Instead of increasing opportunities and liberation from ideological constraints, women experienced a reduction of social and personal options that men of their class did not. For these women, a division was formed between personal and public life. This division served to relegate women to the personal, private realm, closing them off from the public sphere and greatly limiting their possibilities outside of the home. All the advances of Renaissance Italy, from its protocapitalist economy to its humanistic culture, served to turn the noblewoman into an aesthetic object: decorous, chaste, and doubly dependent on a husband or other powerful male figure.⁹

Angelica, in *Orlando Furioso*, is the object of desire *par excellence* precisely because she refuses to reciprocate the attention that the knights constantly give her. Her continual denial of one knight only causes another one to sprout up. Angelica, deliberately or not, plays this game better than anyone else in the poem. Her unparalleled beauty makes her as something that the knights simply must have. Her coldness and continued resistance to their advances only results in increasing her desirability. Nearly all of the knights announce their arrival into the poem by seeing Angelica and expressing their desire for her. It is this combination of seeing Angelica with desire and wanting to possess her that defines Angelica’s primary function in the poem. She represents the “object of the desirous gazes” of the men that pursue her.¹⁰ As an object, Angelica has the same value as Orlando’s famous sword or any other material possession and as such, she cannot be considered lucky or unlucky. It is instead the person who wields the sword that is to be considered fortunate or unfortunate depending on the outcome of the event in question. This idea remains the definition of the heroic rape: the woman is a warrior’s booty, taken like a proud horse or prized helmet.¹¹ For Angelica, fortune will continue to work against her until she agrees to accept one of her many suitors.

When discussing the role of fortune in *Orlando Furioso*, Giorgio Padoan explains that “ogni volta che il bene desiderato sembra raggiunto, questo sfuma” (each time the desired good seems to be achieved, it disappears. My translation.)¹² The “bene desiderato” is almost always a woman and the fortune—for good or bad—of the man perusing her will ultimately determine the outcome of the situation. From the very first canto, Angelica is being pursued.¹³ Before being taken to the island of Ebuda, Angelica was in the grasps of the old hermit who was able to put a spell on her. He too is overcome by the need to possess her sexually and uses his magic so that he can have his way with the sleeping beauty. It is only because of bad fortune that he is not able to “rise” to the occasion and instead is left sexually and mentally frustrated. At this point, the reader is only allowed to experience

⁶ Natalie Tomas, *The Medici Women: Gender and Power in Renaissance Florence* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003), 164.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁸ Kelly-Gadol, “Did Women Have a Renaissance?”

⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹⁰ Shemek, Deanna. *Ladies Errant: Wayward Women and Social Order in Early Modern Italy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 11.

¹¹ Brownmiller, *Against Her Will*, 290.

¹² Giorgio Padoan, “L’*Orlando Furioso* e la crisi del Rinascimento,” in *Ariosto 1974 in America: Atti Del Congresso Ariostesco, Dicembre 1974, Casa Italiana Della Columbia University* (Ravenna: Longo, 1976), 10-11.

¹³ The chase of Angelica is very well known. First it is Rinaldo who is chasing Angelica and she only narrowly escapes him. In a desperate attempt to find help, she ends up in the hands of Sacripante. Angelica thinks that he could be a trustworthy escort but instead of helping her, Sacripante immediately plans on raping her. He justifies this would-be terrible act to himself by saying that women only pretend not to appreciate a man’s sexual advances.

the hermit's disappointment as apposed to the relief that Angelica undoubtedly must have felt. The reader's pity towards the hermit diminishes the totality of violence towards women and decreases men's responsibility for it. From this perspective, men are seen as either helplessly driven by their innate aggressiveness and sexual nature or they themselves become the "victims" of women who invite the abuse upon themselves.¹⁴ Once again the situation is addressed from a male point of view. This one sided reasoning only serves to institutionalize the concept that it is a man's right, if not his divine right, to gain access to the female body, and that sex is a service that no female may deny the civilized male.¹⁵

Unlike Angelica's ability to flee from her pursuers, Lucrezia has nothing to do with the success or failure of Callimaco's plan. She has no say in the matter and in order to achieve success Callimaco only has to convince Lucrezia's husband, Messer Nicia, that the plan he has put forth is a good one. Once in Lucrezia's bedroom, Callimaco is able to force himself upon her. Sex is something that men do to women; men take the initiative, make things happen, and control the event.¹⁶ This case is no exception and only after he has had his way with her body, does Callimaco take a chance and tell her the truth about himself. Through the ages, imperial conquest, deeds of valor and expressions of love have gone hand in hand with violence against women in both thought and in deed.¹⁷ Despite the fact that this is the first time that Callimaco and Lucrezia have actually spoken, he claims to be madly in love with her and unable to live without her caresses that he has only just had, or better put, that he has only just taken.¹⁸

Angelica is also unable to escape her position as vulnerable female and continually moves from one dangerous situation to another. After the old hermit's failed attempt to take her virginity, Angelica is taken by pirates to the island of Ebuda. While on Ebuda, Angelica suffers an extreme form of objectification as she is offered as a nude sacrifice to the island's virgin-eating orc.¹⁹ To the good fortune of the islanders, Angelica was brought to them; and to their bad fortune, Ruggiero is able to save her from being devoured by the orc. Once Angelica has been saved from the orc, she reclaims the ring of Reason and returns to Europe.²⁰

Angelica's best option eventually presents itself in the form of a marriage to Medoro, a man that will show her love and kindness and protect her from the other men that pursue her. Given the barriers to success and stability that women face, sexual competition among women for that limited yet valuable commodity—powerful men—is woman's one dependable route to security.²¹ Because personal freedom is not a choice that Angelica can make, Medoro becomes the preferred option. This, however, comes at the bad fortune of all of her suitors, chiefly Orlando who loses his wits after learning about Angelica's nuptials. When he discovers that Angelica has acted upon her own

¹⁴ Mary Maynard, "Violence Towards Women," in *Thinking Feminism: Key Concepts in Women's Studies*, ed. Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (New York: Guilford, 1993), 111.

¹⁵ Brownmiller, *Against Her Will*, 392.

¹⁶ Diane Richardson, "Sexuality and Male Dominance," in *Thinking Feminism: Key Concepts in Women's Studies*, ed. Diane Richardson and Victoria Robinson (New York: Guilford, 1993), 84.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 289.

¹⁸ Some critics argue that Lucrezia is ultimately responsible for what takes place in *La Mandragola* because she eventually gives her consent and, in the end, agrees to an adulterous relationship. Behuniak-Long argues that Lucrezia was in fact never a person of high moral standard, and should instead be considered a "fickle woman of questionable character" (Behuniak-Long, "The Significance of Lucrezia in Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*," 265). If we look at Machiavelli's work, not as a modern piece of fiction, but as a 16th-century play, it would be difficult to place all of the blame on a woman who had little to no power over her own situation. By agreeing to continue seeing Callimaco, Lucrezia gains some of that power that she otherwise never would have possessed.

¹⁹ Ita Mac Carthy, *Women and the Making of Poetry in Ariosto's Orlando Furioso* (Leicester: Troubador, 2007), 45.

²⁰ The ring allows Angelica to disappear and escape from Ruggiero, another hero obsessed with possessing her sexually.

²¹ Jean Lipman-Blumen, *Gender Roles and Power*, (Englewood Hills: Prentice-Hall, 1984), 46.

needs, outside the circle of his self-defining gaze, Orlando starts his disintegration as subject, resulting in a regression from language and a descent into madness.²² While Orlando never had a commitment from Angelica, he still feels betrayed by her because she allowed another man to possess her. Historically chastity and monogamy has been the price that women had to pay for protection by man against man and any crime committed against her body became a crime against the male protector.²³ Orlando sees Angelica's choice as a crime against him and it drives him mad.

For Angelica, Fortune has been her enemy from the very beginning. She has been exiled from her home, her father and brother have been killed, and she has lost her wealth and good name. For all of her troubles, Angelica blames Fortune and the fact that she is considered beautiful. In the eighth canto she laments her sorry state:

Mi nuoce, ahimè! Ch'io son giovane, e sono
tenuta bella, o sia vero o bugia.
Già non ringrazio il ciel di questo dono;
che di qui nasce ogni ruina mia.²⁴

When Angelica says “sono / tenuta bella, o sia vero o bugia,” she once again is showing that she has no control over her own situation, not even her own beauty. The only power that these women have is the power of attraction, but in the case of Angelica, this power turns out to be her nemesis.²⁵ In her case it is just another piece of misfortune to be considered beautiful. Beauty is something that every knight strives to possess and Angelica, considered to be the most beautiful, is the ultimate prize in *Orlando Furioso*. At this one must wonder why Angelica does not do something to diminish her beauty. The problem with that line of thinking, however, is that it lays blame at the feet of the victim. When women accept a special burden of self-protection it only serves to reinforce the stereotype that they must live and move about in fear. Through this course of action, it will be impossible for women to ever achieve the personal freedom, independence and self-assurance of men.²⁶

Lucrezia's only desire, the reader is told, is to live an honest life in the grace of God.²⁷ In the words of Callimaco, Lucrezia is “honestissima et al tutto aliena dale cose d'amore.”²⁸ Were it not for all of the pressure from outside forces, Lucrezia would never have *sinned*.²⁹ At this point in the story all of the forces are working against her. In order to do what she thinks is right, Lucrezia would have to go against the wishes of her husband, her mother, her doctor and her priest. If she continues with the plan they have laid out for her, she will be forced to make a cuckold of her husband. Yet as authority figures emanate an aura of rightness and their actions cannot easily be challenged, what

²² Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 58.

²³ Brownmiller, *Against Her Will*, 17.

²⁴ Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* I, ed. Gioacchino Paparelli (Milano: Rizzoli, 1991), VII 42, 3-6. Translation: “What profits it that, whether false or true, / I am deemed beauteous, and am young withal? / No thanks to heaven for such a gift are due, / Whence on my head does every mischief fall (Ludovico Ariosto, *The Orlando Furioso*, trans. William Stewart Rose (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1858), 124).

²⁵ Peter Wiggins, *Figures in Ariosto's Tapestry: Character and Design in the Orlando Furioso* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), 166.

²⁶ Brownmiller, *Against Her Will*, 400.

²⁷ In Machiavelli's day, the name of Lucrezia was synonymous with fidelity and virtue (Behuniak-Long, “The Significance of Lucrezia in Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*,” 267).

²⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, *La Mandragola*, ed. Giorgio Inglese (Napoli: Mulino, 1997), 38.

²⁹ Lucrezia's ready acceptance of her new lover is surprising only because the change in lifestyles is so drastic. See Joseph Barber, “The Irony of Lucrezia: Machiavelli's *Donna di virtù*,” *Studies in Philology* 82, no. 4 (1985): 458. This radical change has caused some critics to question Lucrezia's character. In this analysis, the steadfastness of her character is not being questioned. What is, instead, is how outside pressures and objectification determines the outcome of Lucrezia's situation.

else can Lucrezia be but wrong if she resists the will of those around her? As socialization teaches that men know best, Lucrezia eventually gives in. The only reason, however, that the opportunity arose for her to go against what she believed to be right was because of her unparalleled beauty.³⁰

Although Lucrezia is the central figure of *La Mandragola*, she has the fewest lines of any character in the play. In fact, Lucrezia has so little to do with the action that most of what the reader learns about her comes not from firsthand information but from what the other characters say about her. In Ariosto's epic poem, Angelica's situation is the same. The narrator is not interested in what Angelica has to say, instead attention and importance is given to the knight that is currently pursuing her. Angelica's monologue expresses a different reality from the one that is offered by the narrator who acts as a spokesperson for the knights.³¹ He describes Angelica as hard and unfeeling. As readers, we cannot help but sympathize with Orlando and continue to hold out hope that he will end up winning Angelica.

For the majority of the poem, Angelica functions less as a real character than as an abstract value. In most cases it is easier to blame her for the ills that befall the male characters who attempt to have her than to feel empathy for her wretched state of existence.³² After escaping with the ring of reason, Angelica considers taking on a guide and protector for her return home. Once she reveals herself to the knights, however, she realizes that her wants will not be taken into consideration. She is denied the ability to be both visible and to have her own desire recognized.³³ After her immediate flight from her pursuers, it is again Angelica that is portrayed as cold and pitiless towards the knights. The men that only wish to possess her sexually have somehow been wronged by her sudden departure. As the narrator coolly explains: "Di lor si ride Angelica proterva, / che non e' vista, e i lor progressi osserva" (Meantime their ways the wanton Indian queen / Observes, and at their wonder laughs unseen).³⁴ As the reader learns, the woman cannot be the hero. Her only choice is to be the victim or the temptress. History neither honors nor mythifies the strong woman who defends herself successfully against bodily assault. It instead remembers and celebrates the beautiful woman who dies a violent death while trying. As Brownmiller states, "A good heroine is a dead heroine, we are taught, for victory through physical triumph is a male prerogative that is incompatible with feminine behavior. The sacrifice of life, we learn, is the most perfect testament to a woman's integrity and honor."³⁵

In literature as in life, division of gender roles as a defining factor in the construction of social norms and acceptable behavior existed long before the renaissance and is still prevalent today. These socially created expectations serve to determine, and many cases limit, masculine and feminine behavior. The socialization of gender roles begins at birth; male and female infants receive different treatment, immediately setting them on entirely different life paths.³⁶ Once these social arrangements have been established, those who have become accustomed to the greater privileges and power – in this case, men—consider it to be both natural and imperative to defend the status quo. The group that benefits most from this arrangement comes to believe that it truly deserve the dominant position and as a result, guards it vigorously.³⁷

³⁰ The reader of *La Mandragola* first hears about Lucrezia in France through a discussion of whether French or Italian women are more beautiful. Callimaco is so moved by the argument in favor of the Florentine woman that he feels compelled to go and see her for himself.

³¹ Mac Carthy, *Women and the Making of Poetry*, 52.

³² Wiggins, *Figures in Ariosto's Tapestry*, 166.

³³ Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 67.

³⁴ Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, XII 36, 7-8.

³⁵ Brownmiller, *Against Her Will*, 328.

³⁶ Lipman-Blumen, *Gender Roles and Power*, 54.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

What separates the men from the women in *Orlando Furioso* and *La Mandragola* is the feeling of vulnerability with which the women are repeatedly left. From a young age, learning dependence and helplessness, rather than self-assurance and self-reliance, becomes one of the primary tasks of female socialization.³⁸ Males instead, learn early in life to view aggression as a resource that can move them toward targeted goals in the public arena. They are conventionally trained to use competition and aggression as a means to accomplish their goals.³⁹ Whether it is through scheming or pure violence, the male's end goal is to claim the object of his desire. The idea that society has determined that aggressiveness is a natural, and therefore acceptable, masculine role has permeated false notions of masculinity. It is instilled in young boys from the moment they realize that being a male comes with certain innate privileges including the right to buy a woman's body. Might be a good idea to include source here too: "When young men learn that females may be bought for a price, and that acts of sex command set prices, then how should they not also conclude that that which may be bought may also be taken without the civility of a monetary exchange?"⁴⁰ It is through the experience of sexuality that women learn about gender, female subordination and male power.⁴¹

Historically, women have been able to increase their bargaining power with men by refusing to give in to a man's sexual desires. By holding out on sexual favors, women could influence the men that courted them. As female beauty and implied sexuality are associated with male success, a beautiful and sexy woman is seen as an enviable prize for a successful male.⁴² This idea has led to what Catherine Hakim refers to as "erotic capital."⁴³ Hakim defines erotic capital as the valuation of "a combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social, and sexual attractiveness to other members of your society, and especially to members of the opposite sex, in all social contexts."⁴⁴ As great beauty is considered to be in short supply, it is universally valorized and desired resulting in women typically possessing more erotic capital than men. This advantage in erotic capital potentially gives women an advantage in negotiations with men.⁴⁵

For Lucrezia and Angelica it is instead the opposite. Their power comes from giving in to a man's sexual advances. Once Lucrezia becomes the woman possessed, she ceases to be the woman desired. After Callimaco possesses her body, Lucrezia holds the key to his happiness and it becomes something that she can give to him, or take away, whenever she pleases.⁴⁶ Early in *Orlando Furioso*, Sacripante is seen lamenting the fact that he has not been able to be the one to take Angelica's virginity. He is not complaining about losing her, but instead about his losing her precious virginity:

La virginella è simile alla rosa,
ch'in bel giardin su la nativa spina
mentre sola e sicura si riposa.⁴⁷

Ma non sì tosto dal materno stelo
rimossa viene e dal suo ceppo verde,

³⁸ Ibid., 62.

³⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 391.

⁴¹ Richardson, "Sexuality and Male Dominance," 94.

⁴² Lipman-Blumen, *Gender Roles and Power*, 90.

⁴³ Catherine Hakim, "Erotic Capital," *European Sociological Review* 26, no. 5 (2010): 499-518.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 501.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 505.

⁴⁶ "Ironically, the woman seduced, Lucrezia, emerges as a true embodiment of Machiavelli's *donna di virtùe*" (Barber, "The Irony of Lucrezia," 450).

⁴⁷ Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, I 42, 1-3. Translation: "The virgin has her image in the rose / Sheltered in garden on its native stock, / Which there in solitude and safe repose"(Ariosto, *The Orlando Furioso*, 9).

che quanto avea dagli uomini e dal cielo
 favor, grazia e bellezza, tutto perde.⁴⁸

Angelica's objectification only lessens once it is believed that she is no longer a virgin. Once her "rose has been plucked," the knights decide that she is no longer worth pursuing. This act of "defloration" has historically been of much greater psychological importance to men than it ever has to women. When a husband "deflowered" his wife on their wedding night, he was in effect breaking open a pristine package that now belonged to him. It was now his private property and he wanted tangible proof of the quality of his acquisition.⁴⁹ All the knights strive to be the one to open this *pristine package*. Orlando, the ultimate hero, loses his wits when he finds out that another man has essentially defeated him. At this point, even the author of the poem seems unsure of what to do with Angelica. By acting on her love for Medoro, Angelica ceases to be the object desired. As Shemek points out, after the defloration her character will disappear from the *Furioso*: "Having no place for this unforeseen subjectivity of Woman, the poem will relegate the narration of Angelica's life after love to other texts, in poems to be written by others."⁵⁰

Lucrezia is the object that Callimaco must have and will stop at nothing to possess. Lucrezia's life is ruled by those around her and it is not until she allows herself to be possessed by Callimaco that her situation begins to improve. In exchange, however, Lucrezia gives up her humanity. Her status is reduced to that of a thing, a mere sexual instrument.⁵¹ Callimaco, who always has a kind word when it comes to Lucrezia, is obviously not interested in her because of her high moral character. He seems best able to express his true feelings when speaking with the devious Ligurio, a man who will do anything to improve his own situation. When talking to Ligurio, Callimaco offers no praise of Lucrezia instead only his need to possess her. His love is an expression of the lover's physical needs and his selfishness is made clear throughout the play.⁵²

In both *Orlando Furioso* and *La Mandragola*, the heroic rapist's inability to possess the woman is what drives him mad and causes him to lash out. The twenty-ninth canto of *Orlando Furioso* ends with an impassioned tirade against women for the maddening effects they have on the men who desire them. The narrator of Ariosto's epic poem curses them all and wishes for the extinction of the entire female sex since, as he puts it: "tutte son ingrato, / né si trova tra loro oncia di buono."⁵³ By blaming the victim these men prefer to see rape deterrence as a woman's problem rather than as a societal problem born from a distorted masculine philosophy of aggression and male privilege.⁵⁴ An established antifeminist theory is the one that proposes that all women secretly wish to be ravished and that no woman can be raped against her will.⁵⁵ This theory gives the heroic rapist the divine mandate to continue his quest. What he does not realize, or care about, is the effect that it has

⁴⁸ Ibid., I 43, 1-4. Translation: (But wanton hands no sooner this displace / From the maternal stem, where it was grown, / Than all is withered; whatsoever grace / It found with man or heaven; bloom, beauty, gone" (Ariosto, *The Orlando Furioso*, 10).

⁴⁹ Brownmiller, *Against Her Will*, 319.

⁵⁰ Shemek, *Ladies Errant*, 58.

⁵¹ For an in-depth analysis of how sexual activity can lead to the loss or the sacrifice of humanity, see Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, trans. Louis Infield (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 163-164. In it he discusses the degradation and subordination of humanity when sexuality and sexual activity is involved.

⁵² Harvey Mansfield, "The Cuckold in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*," in *Comedy and Tragedy of Machiavelli: Essays on the Literary Works*, ed. Vickie Sullivan (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000), 11.

⁵³ Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* II, ed. Mario Apollonio (Milano: Rizzoli, 1944), XXIX 74.

⁵⁴ Brownmiller, *Against Her Will*, 400.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 312.

on the woman involved. That a woman must worry about the possibility of being raped is a process of intimidation that keeps all women in a constant state of fear of all men.⁵⁶

When Lucrezia cannot become pregnant, she alone must shoulder the blame. Her husband, Messer Nicia, tries everything possible to cure his wife of her supposed infertility and yet he will not consider the possibility that he could be the cause of the couple's pregnancy problems. In certain cultures, a woman's erotic capital is closely tied to her fertility.⁵⁷ For Lucrezia, her problems come from her inability to become pregnant. She is seen as a lesser woman because she cannot provide her husband with an heir. Even though Lucrezia's problems stem from her husband's sterility, she is to blame for the failure of conception. By taking Callimaco as a permanent lover, Lucrezia is able to resolve the legal problem of an heir and secure her own future. In accepting Callimaco, Lucrezia establishes the ground rules and tells him: "Perhò io ti prendo per signiore, patrone, guida; tu mio padre, tu mio difensore et tu voglio che sia ogni mio bene."⁵⁸ Lucrezia submits to the heroic rapist in order to improve her situation. Were something to happen to Messer Nicia, Callimaco, who readily accepts Lucrezia's proposal, would be right there to take his place. Lucrezia gains some power over Callimaco by exploiting her own weakness. Females learn the subtle lesson of controlling powerful men through demonstrated helplessness but this "learned helplessness" also serves to entrap women.⁵⁹ Callimaco has taken title to Lucrezia's body, a great sexual convenience as well as a testament to his intellectual stature, and in return he has to assume the burden of protecting her from potential harm. This is what Callimaco promises Lucrezia. He has gained access to her body and in return she is given the protection and security that her situation previously lacked. After being under the control of others, Lucrezia finally has a chance to gain some control over her own situation and it is an opportunity that she will not let slip away. She expresses her newfound boldness by tricking her husband into giving Callimaco a key to their house.⁶⁰ After Messer Nicia introduces Callimaco to Lucrezia, she guides the conversation to the end that she has planned:

LUCREZIA. Io l'ho molto caro; e' vuolsi che sia nostro compare.

NICIA. Et vo' dar loro la chiave della camera terrena, d'in su la loggia, perché possino tornarsi quivi a lloro comodità: ch'e' non hanno donne in casa et stanno come bestie.

CALLIMACO. Io l'accepto, per usare quando mi acaggia.⁶¹

By the end of *Orlando Furioso*, all appears resolved for Angelica as well. She has found a reliable escort and is about to begin a journey home to reclaim her lost identity. Despite the constant

⁵⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁷ Hakim, "Erotic Capital," 501.

⁵⁸ Machiavelli, *La Mandragola*, 105. The English translation of *La Mandragola* used is Niccolò Machiavelli, "La Mandragola," trans. Leonard G. Sbrocchi and J. Douglas Campbell, in *Renaissance Comedy: The Italian Masters*, ed. Donald Beecher (Toronto: Toronto UP, 2010), 101-162. Translation: "Therefore I take you as lord, master, guide. I want you as my father, my defender, and as my dearest good" (Machiavelli, "La Mandragola," 156).

⁵⁹ Lipman-Blumen, *Gender Roles and Power*, 62.

⁶⁰ Behuniak-Long refers to the actions that unfold as the fall of Lucrezia. She argues that Lucrezia was evil from the beginning because of her choice to embrace the deceit of Callimaco rather than the foolish kindness of her husband Messer Nicia (Behuniak-Long, "The Significance of Lucrezia in Machiavelli's *La Mandragola*," 264, 271). I agree with Behuniak-Long's assessment of Lucrezia's actions but not with the motivations that she proposes to be behind those actions. As is expressed by Machiavelli in *Il Principe*, fortune favors the bold and it is the boldness of Lucrezia that allows her to go from shy and quiet pawn of Fortune to a player in the game.

⁶¹ Machiavelli, *La Mandragola*, 108. Translation: "LUCREZIA. I am indebted to him: and he must be our dear friend. / NICIA. And I want to give them the key to the door downstairs that opens onto the loggia, so that they can come back whenever it suits them. They have no women at home, and they live like animals. / CALLIMACO. I accept, and I'll use it when I can" (Machiavelli, "La Mandragola," 158).

attempts of her many suitors to claim her virginity and soil her good name, Angelica is about to be reinstated as queen of Cathay.

While the lives of these two women appear to have taken a turn for the better, this was only possible because all of the men have already lived out their own fortunes. Throughout the works both Angelica and Lucrezia are objectified and vilified for not immediately giving in to men's desires. Medoro and Callimaco represent the only choice that these women have to gain some control of their own situation and to live out their lives in peace and security. As Brownmiller aptly states: "Female fear of an open season of rape, and not a natural inclination toward monogamy, motherhood or love, was probably the single causative factor in the original subjugation of woman by man, the most important key to her historic dependence, her domestication by protective mating."⁶² To say that Angelica or Lucrezia made their choices for any other reason than safety and security would be to deny the existence of the heroic rapist and the perpetual state of fear that he creates.

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⁶² Brownmiller, *Against Her Will*, 16.

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