CHAUCER'S LUCRETIA AND WHAT AUGUSTINE REALLY SAID ABOUT RAPE TWO RECONSIDERATIONS

By JOHN BUGBEE

*Saint Augustine "hath gret compassioun / Of this Lucresse," declares a couplet early in Chaucer's retelling of the story of the Roman rape victim and suicide Lucretia — prompting the majority of modern commentators to conclude that the poet either never read Augustine's treatment of the story directly, or subsequently forgot what it says, or speaks here with deliberate irony. How, they ask, could anyone familiar with that text (*City of God *1.19) judge it to be compassionate? But a second look reveals that the question has some positive answers, particularly when one attends not merely to the single chapter that names Lucretia but also to the surrounding thirteen-chapter discussion of rape and suicide in general. There Augustine shows compassion in several concrete ways that later summarizers omit and most modern readers overlook; the text even includes "compassion" in the strictest etymological sense of an attempt to feel-and-suffer-with a rape victim by imagining her inner world. Close attention to Chaucer's poem (the fifth in the* Legend of Good Women*) then uncovers more positive evidence for direct knowledge of Augustine, namely several apparent Chaucerian innovations in the story — most dramatically the fact that his Lucretia swoons just before the rape rather than "yielding" — that are easy to explain if the author was influenced by the* City of God *but are unnecessary or simply puzzling if not. A brief conclusion suggests points at which Chaucer's direct knowledge of Augustine's text might affect our interpretations of other poems.*

This essay has two theses, one of which has grown out of the other. It began as a paper about Chaucer and Augustine, rooted in the discovery of some simple and concrete congruences between Chaucer's "Legend of Lucrece" and the first book of the *City of God*. The thesis that emerged directly is that despite the contrary consensus that has dominated literary scholarship for at least eighty years, it is almost certain that Chaucer knew book one of Augustine's treatise at first hand rather than only through some intermediate source. Preparing to make that point led to a second discovery: numerous writers in that same eighty-year span, including large numbers of Anglophone literary medievalists in particular, have routinely misrepresented what Augustine says about Lucretia. The two theses are closely intertwined, and because making a plausible case for the first requires demonstration of the second, the bulk of the work to be done about Augustine appears here before the bulk of the work about Chaucer.[1]

[1] Given the history of critical writing about Chaucer over the last seventy years, a paper concerned with the poet's relation to Augustine can hardly help mentioning the controversies

Traditio 74 (2019), 335–373

doi:10.1017/tdo.2019.6

1. The Problem, with the Solutions Currently Available

Most of the discussion about Chaucer's possible knowledge of the *City of God* has centered on what appears to be a direct reference to the book made near the start of the story of Lucretia in the *Legend of Good Women*. "The grete Austyn hath gret compassioun / Of this Lucresse, that starf at Rome toun," Chaucer writes (1690–91); and as Augustine does not appear to comment on the story at any length elsewhere, it would seem that Chaucer has the prominently placed discussion in the *City of God* (book 1, chapter 19) in mind.[2] There is, however, a difficulty: the treatment Lucretia gets there does not at first glance seem especially rife with *compassioun*. For one thing, part of its conclusion is that she has reacted badly to the awful events that have befallen her: Augustine argues at length that, barring the exceptional and hard-to-discern case of a direct command from God, suicide is always morally wrong. Still worse, in the course of the discussion he traps Lucretia in a piece of dilemmatic logic that has struck many readers as unkind at best, and at worst downright cruel. If Lucretia was completely innocent of any desire for the assault of the rapist Tarquin, Augustine reasons, then she has committed a different crime: that of putting to death an innocent person, namely herself. If she has not

over "patristic" or "exegetical" criticism. Here, however, I will for the most part avoid engaging those debates directly, keeping them instead in mind primarily as a background that may still affect the reception in some quarters of an article that pairs the two writers. It seems to me legitimate to proceed in that fashion both because much of the field has, I think, turned away from "those old battle lines," in the words of a hope expressed by Alcuin Blamires already over a decade ago (*Chaucer, Ethics, and Gender* [Oxford, 2006], 231); and, more importantly, because the goals and scope of this paper simply do not carry it into realms where a direct engagement would be required. Its goals are, in the end, fairly simple: to set the record straight about a comparatively brief stretch of Augustine's writing that is very frequently misread, and then to show that once the correction is made, there is good evidence that Chaucer knew that particular stretch of writing, interpreted it more accurately than many modern readers have done, and shaped one of his poems in response. There is no reason in such a context to worry over larger claims about the features of style (allegory) and content (cupidity and charity) that exegetical criticism found pervasive in medieval literature and largely traced to Augustine, especially to his *De doctrina christiana*; nor is there need, or space, for a judicious consideration of the uses and abuses of "historicism" in general, fascinating and worthwhile as such questions are.

[2] Quotations from Chaucer rely on the *Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd edition, ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston, 1987). For Augustine's text (abbreviated DCD hereafter) I have translated from the critical Latin edition *De civitate Dei*, ed. Bernard Dombart and Alfonsus Kalb, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1981) and have attempted to value precision over grace. Two useful recent Englishings are *The City of God (De civitate Dei)*, trans. William Babcock (Hyde Park, NY, 2012), and *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge, UK, 1998). By way of verifying the absence of any reference to Lucretia in those parts of Augustine's writings beyond my direct experience, I searched works attributed to him in the Patrologia Latina Database (http://pld.chadwyck.com/) for all forms of her name; the only instances were from the *City of God*, which, besides the discussion in book one, briefly refers to her in books two and three.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2019.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

put to death an innocent person, then — since for Augustine there is no way to incur guilt by being purely on the receiving end of someone else's action — she must have harbored some hidden consent to the rape after all. In either case, the implication seems to be, she is not quite worthy of the unreserved praise that the Romans lavish upon her. And as if all these forms of disapproval were not enough, Augustine ends his consideration by saying that not only was the deed of suicide objectively unjust, but its motives were less noble than is sometimes supposed. The passage is frequently quoted:

> Therefore the fact that because she endured an adulterer she killed herself, of all people, even though she was no adulteress, is not the love of chastity, but the inconstancy of shame. For she was ashamed of another's disgrace committed against her, even though not with her, and the Roman woman [or "wife": Latin *mulier*], excessively eager for praise, feared that it would be supposed that what she underwent violently while she lived she underwent willingly — if she lived. For which reason she supposed that employing this penalty would be a witness of her mind to human eyes, to which she could not display her conscience.[3]

According to Augustine it is not regret over lost chastity, but a bad reaction to the fear of shame, rooted in a yearning for praise endemic to Roman women (or wives), that has led to Lucretia's drastic action. One begins to see why so many recent writers have thought that an author working under the sway of *gret compassioun*, particularly in the etymological sense of a capacity to feel-and-suffer-with this victim of acquaintance rape, might say something a bit different.

Nearly everyone who comments on the "Legend of Lucrece," in fact, attempts to explain the apparent discrepancy between Augustine's text and the two-word

[3] DCD 1.19. "Of all people" renders Augustine's use of the emphatic reflexive *se ipsam*: in context the implication seems to be that Tarquin, the "adulterer," was the one who should have been killed. Earlier in the chapter Augustine has remarked how unjust it is that the innocent Lucretia died while the guilty Tarquin was merely exiled; Roman law after Constantine (thus at the time of Augustine's authorship) did in fact make rape a capital offense. For a quick survey of different meanings of *raptus* and some of the various punishments accorded it in Europe across the centuries, see Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law* (Philadelphia, 1991), 2–11; further detail about late-medieval England is available in Joseph Allen Hornsby, *Chaucer and the Law* (Norman, OK, 1988), 115–21. The phrase *pudoris infirmitas* can of course be translated as the "weakness," rather than the "inconstancy," of shame, but that rendering risks implying that Augustine thinks shame *per se* a weakness, which statements earlier in book one will not allow; and the connection here with Lucretia's sudden and inappropriate action suggests that he means to point out an instability inspired by an excessively strong transport of shame. The Latin reads: "Quod ergo se ipsam, quoniam adulterum pertulit, etiam non adultera occidit, non est pudicitiae caritas, sed pudoris infirmitas. Puduit enim eam turpitudinis alienae in se commissae, etiamsi non secum, et Romana mulier, laudes avida nimium, verita est ne putaretur, quod violenter est passa cum viveret, libenter passa si viveret. Unde ad oculos hominum testem mentis suae illam poenam adhibendam putavit, quibus conscientiam demonstrare non potuit."

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2019.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

review Chaucer gives it. Ninety years ago J. S. P. Tatlock offered to dispatch the problem quickly, if wryly, by crediting it to a slip in the poet's memory.[4] Writers of the last few decades, on the other hand, have tended rather to believe that Chaucer's memory never had a chance to prove its mettle in this particular arena, because it never met Augustine's text in the first place: Chaucer likely drew instead on some intermediate source, they reason, whose abridgments or other changes gave the poet his mistaken idea about the *compassioun* of the original. Among proposed intermediaries the version of Lucretia's story in the *Gesta Romanorum*, which claims as its own source the *City of God* rather than the vastly more developed accounts in Livy and Ovid, turns up often; the late-fourteenth-century translation of Valerius Maximus into French by Simon de Hesdin, which supplements Valerius's short account with long passages from Livy and also briefly describes Augustine's treatment, is another candidate.[5] A second set of writers

[4] J. S. P. Tatlock, "Chaucer and the *Legenda Aurea*," *Modern Language Notes* 45 (1930): 296–98, at 296 n. 1.

[5] The earliest examples I have seen of these suggestions appear respectively in Robert Worth Frank, Jr., *Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women* (Cambridge, MA, 1972), 97 nn. 7, 8; and John P. McCall, *Chaucer among the Gods: The Poetics of Classical Myth* (University Park, PA, 1979), 178 n. 35. Only the second explicitly suggests that his alternative source would better explain Chaucer's attribution of *compassioun* to Augustine. Frank, to the contrary, argues that the word could describe what *City of God* 1.19 actually contains; but he relies on a single phrase to do so, and one that could easily be attributed to the Roman admirers of Lucretia whom Augustine is attempting to best in argument. Nonetheless some later writers (see following note) have taken up his suggestion that Chaucer "may have remembered Augustine's connection with Lucretia's story from the *Gesta*" in their efforts to explain what seems to them, as to most recent critics, an unbelievable description.

As for the ancient Roman sources, it is clear that Chaucer follows primarily not the long account in Livy but that in book two of Ovid's *Fasti*, lines 721–852. Though he also (line 1683) refers to Livy, it is difficult to tell whether he actually drew on that source; for discussion, see the *Riverside Chaucer*, 1070A. I have used the texts in Titus Livius, *Ab urbe condita libri*, ed. W. Weissenborn and H. J. Müller (Zurich, 2000), 1:257–62, and P. Ovidius Naso, *Die Fasten*, ed. Franz Bömer (Heidelberg, 1957), 1:128–35. For Lucretia in the *Gesta*, see *Die Gesta Romanorum*, ed. Wilhelm Dick (Erlangen, 1890, repr. Amsterdam, 1970), 69–70, or the somewhat different version in *Gesta Romanorum*, ed. Hermann Oesterley (1892, repr. Hildesheim, 1980), 489–90. A recent English translation, primarily from Oesterley, is *Gesta Romanorum*, trans. Christopher Stace (Manchester, UK, 2016), 343–44; the earlier translation *Gesta Romanorum: Or, Entertaining Moral Stories*, trans. Charles Swan, rev. Wynnard Hooper (New York, 1894 [repr. 1970]), 239–41, matches neither of these Latin editions precisely. Simon de Hesdin's translation of Valerius has not been edited in modern times; I have used an early printing of Valerius Maximus, *Les neuf livres de Valère le Grant, translatez du latin en françois par très-révérend maistre Simon de Hesdin, … et achevez par Nicolas de Gonesse* (Paris, 1500). At this writing its text is available, along with roughly ten still earlier printings, through the Gallica website of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. For the 1500 printing, see http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1106657; Simon's summary of Augustine is near the end of book 6, chapter 1 ("vue 446" of the unpaginated manuscript). It is not entirely clear whether Simon's text circulated widely in time for Chaucer to use it for his *Legend*. We do

has been willing to credit to Chaucer an encounter with the original text but has suggested that deliberate irony is at play, whether in Chaucer's own voice or, in the case of at least one proposal, as a result of Chaucer's creation of an implied narrator who "ignores the substance of Augustine's lengthy commentary."[6] Virtually all responses to Chaucer's text currently in circulation attempt to solve the problem by resort either to the hypothesis of an intermediary or to that of irony.

Neither route, however, promises a particularly smooth journey. The reasons for not adopting the second hypothesis are best postponed for the moment, as the detailed look at Augustine's text that follows will bring them to light without additional effort. As for the notion of an intermediate source, there is nothing implausible about the idea itself; but trouble arises quickly on closer examination, because the hypotheses taken from this group generally do not explain the "data," the ascription of *compassioun* to Augustine, any better than does the hypothesis that Chaucer read the *City of God* directly. In the case of Simon de Hesdin, in fact, the opposite is true, as his single-sentence summary of Augustine's judgment seems considerably harsher than the original. "Saint Augustine speaks of this Lucresse," he writes, "and says in the first book of the *City of God*, in the nineteenth chapter, that she killed herself more because of desire for praise than because of love of chastity, and that she preferred that it would become clear that she had been violated against her will rather than [preferring] that she would be defamed [viz., according to Tarquin's final threat,

not know the exact date of the latter, but it almost certainly falls within a few years on either side of 1386, a likely estimate of the year of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*; see the *Riverside Chaucer*, 1059A, 1060A–B. Simon had translated the story of Lucretia (along with the rest of Valerius down to book 7, chapter 4) by the time of his death in 1383, but most of the extant manuscripts of his translation include Valerian's entire work, indicating that they were produced only after Nicholas de Gonesse finished the translation in 1401. Here I have adopted the working hypothesis that Chaucer could have known Simon's translation, but only in order to demonstrate that even if he did, his acquaintance with it would not explain what we see in the "Legend of Lucrece." See *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises: Le Moyen Âge*, ed. Geneviève Hasenohr and Michel Zink (n.p., 1992), s.vv. Simon de Hesdin, Nicolas de Gonesse.

[6] This last suggestion comes from Lisa J. Kiser, *Telling Classical Tales: Chaucer and the Legend of Good Women* (Ithaca, NY, 1983), 105. Without supposing an implied narrator, Corrine Saunders similarly suggests that Chaucer had an accurate grasp of Augustine's ideas about Lucretia, cannot have found them compassionate, and deliberately misstated Augustine's views (Chaucer "ironically describes Augustine as sympathetic," she writes, and "may … simply [have rewritten] his *auctor* according to his own perspective"). Saunders also leaves open, however, the possibility of combining that explanation for Chaucer's puzzling remark with one based on intermediate sources, notably the *Gesta Romanorum*. See her *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge, UK, 2001), 268. Sheila Delany is equally willing to combine these two types of explanation, though instead of the *Gesta* she suggests the influence of Ralph Higden's *Polychronicon*, on which more in a moment; see *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley, 1994), 205.

discussed below] without being violated."[7] The attempt to trace Chaucer's comment to the *Gesta Romanorum* is at first glance more viable, in part because that text, instead of summarizing Augustine's judgments in the course of a longer retelling, simply attributes the entire story to Augustine and does not mention his judgments, pro or con, at all. The bare story that it then relates, lacking Augustine's observations about Lucretia's imperfect motives and also his eagerness to show the general sinfulness of suicide, does leave the reader with a more favorable impression than does the end of Augustine's nineteenth chapter. But Lucretia comes across in the *Gesta* not as an object of pity but as a noble heroine: a victim, to be sure, but one of impressively, if not frighteningly, stalwart fortitude. She is, moreover, in that text an allegorical Everysoul — explicitly so in some manuscripts, which append to the story a short exposition of its alleged hidden meaning. As one might expect in a retelling aimed at allegory, there is not a touch of pathos in the very brief account of her death. For all these reasons, even if a reader believed that the *Gesta* had given him or her an accurate view of Augustine's treatment of Lucretia, *compassioun* would be a peculiar word for describing the impression it makes.

A third, more intricate version of the intermediate-source idea deserves a somewhat lengthier look: this is Andrew Galloway's proposal to trace Chaucer's impression of Augustine-on-Lucretia to a group of fourteenth-century Englishmen, perhaps as many as five of them, who wrote commentaries on the *City of God* or passed along or translated the commentaries of others.[8] The first of these is

[7] Translation mine. The first part of Simon's précis is true enough as a simple propositional statement, though the proposition's appearance out of the rich context of Augustine's discussion renders its tone more dismissive and final here than there. In the second part, beginning with "and that she preferred," more serious difficulties arise. Simon seems to imagine a point at which Lucretia was faced with a choice between being defamed without rape and being raped but ensuring that everyone would know the attack was against her will — a point at which she chose the latter but perhaps should have chosen the former. Of the many problems with that account of things, the simplest is that Augustine, despite Simon's direct attribution, does not say it. As we will see below, his presentation of the story in no way suggests that Lucretia has any choice in the rape: indeed, almost uniquely among retellers of the tale, he removes that possibility altogether and simply declares the rape an act of violence. Simon seems to be conflating Augustine's version with some elements in Livy and Ovid that could be interpreted (though those two authors themselves appear to disavow the possibility) as leaving open the question of whether Lucretia should be blamed for giving in; see further nn. 43 and 46 below and associated text. For the passage, see Valerius Maximus, *Les neuf livres*, trans. S. de Hesdin (n. 5 above); the original reads: "De ceste lucresse parle saint augustin: & dit au premier livre de la cite de dieu au dixneufviesme chapitre q[ue]lle se tua plus pour appetit de louenge que pour amour de chastete: & ayma mieulx quil apparust quelle eust este violee contre sa voulente quelle fust difammee sans estre violee."

[8] Andrew Galloway, "Chaucer's *Legend of Lucrece* and the Critique of Ideology in Fourteenth-Century England," *ELH* 60 (1993): 813–32.

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Nicholas Trevet, a writer of whom Chaucer has demonstrable knowledge, as another of Trevet's works underlies most of the Man of Law's Tale. Trevet's full-length commentary then influenced the later efforts of his fellow friars Thomas Waleys and John Ridevall, and Ridevall's at least was a strong influence on Ralph Hidgen's universal history or *Polychronicon*, which often borrows directly from it — a fact that Galloway seems to have been the first to register. The *Polychronicon* was apparently among the fourteenth century's most widely disseminated texts, and was translated into Middle English by John Trevisa in 1387, making it possible that Chaucer read the translation before writing his "Legend of Lucrece" (though the timing, for which see note 5, would be tight). Galloway's article is not in the first instance concerned to explain Chaucer's perception of a compassionate Augustine; it is after a broader point of intellectual history, arguing that an appreciation of an ancient Roman ethics of fame and shame grew gradually across the fourteenth century in England just as it had in Italy, rather than appearing suddenly and with little English precedent, as some have argued, in Chaucer.[9] Nonetheless his article does along the way propose that the remark about *gret compassioun* — which he labels a "peculiarly inept characterization" of the material in the *City of God* — is "explicable if Chaucer did not bother to go beyond the version of Augustine's account of Lucretia" to be found in this group of English writers, particularly Ridevall and Higden.[10]

The claim is noteworthy and the article useful, both in drawing attention to the often overlooked material in these writers and in raising questions about the differences between a Roman cultural "ideology" based on shame and a Christian one more concerned with guilt. Nonetheless it must be said that some of the essay's claims, including this one, find themselves seriously undercut by problems with its representation of what Augustine actually wrote. Galloway believes that the five medieval Englishmen were more attuned to the differences between their culture and that of prerepublican Rome, and more impressed with the latter, than Augustine had been; and in arguing the point he says that the five made as they passed along Augustine's work a number of innovations that might lead a reader who did not know Augustine directly to believe that the fifth-century bishop had been as much of a "sympathetic historicist" as they were.[11] The trouble is that many of the instances offered are not innovations at all, but the straightforward transmission of a plain-sense reading of Augustine. One example directly relevant to this present essay appears in the article's longest direct quotation, taken from Trevisa's translation of Higden:

[9] Galloway, "Chaucer's *Legend*," 815–16, 825–26.
[10] Galloway, "Chaucer's *Legend*," 828.
[11] Galloway, "Chaucer's *Legend*," 832 n. 47.

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> R. Wyse men here telleþ þat Lucrecia slouȝ noȝt here sylf for no vertu bote for schame and for angre, ffor noþer man noþer womman scholde be punesched wiþoute gult noþer gulty wiþoute iuge. Bote for þe Romayns coueyteþ most preysyng of men and worldlych worschyp, þes Lucrecia dradde ȝef a lyuede after þe spousebruche lest þe people wolde wene þat heo was assentyng to þe dede and þerfor in tokne þat heo was sory for þe dede and a wolde nouȝt leose here goode loos noþer be despysed a wolde no lengre lyve.[12]

The initial *R*, spelled out to *Ranulphus* in Higden's Latin, marks a transition between Hidgen's direct borrowing or paraphrase from an authoritative source and his own comment (though the latter may itself derive from another source, as Galloway has discovered that it does here; Higden is quoting Ridevall's *City of God* commentary). In this case the preceding paraphrase claims Livy and Augustine as its sources, though what Higden actually transmits there is overwhelmingly if not entirely from Livy. According to Galloway, *R*-marked comments like this one often serve Higden as opportunities to judge among or even correct the opinions of the preceding authorities; and in this particular case, he believes that that work begins with the second sentence. "The second 'Bote,'" he writes, " … marks [Higden's] characteristic oppositional posture."[13] That claim fits the article's general theme: Galloway takes the passage's second sentence as evidence that fourteenth-century historicists like Ridevall and Higden soften Augustine's harsh conclusions as a result of their own greater willingness to take sympathetic account of the differences between ancient Roman culture and their own.

In fact, however, this passage contains no softening of, and no opposition to, its ancient source. Higden's (and Trevisa's) second sentence puts forward nothing beyond the ideas we have already seen in Augustine himself, and with diction sufficiently close to Augustine's to suggest that Hidgen, so far from meaning to oppose Augustine, was simply passing along the summary and paraphrase of the *City of God* that he found in Ridevall, and that neither fourteenth-century writer has done much beyond compressing the text and slightly simplifying its language. The similarity of all three sources becomes clear when one compares Higden's and Ridevall's Latin with that of the key passage from Augustine cited above; the choice of words is strikingly similar, nor can I detect any

[12] Galloway's transcription ("Chaucer's *Legend*," 824) from British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius D VII (fol. 89). The text is also edited in *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden Monachi Cestrensis: Together with the English Translations of John of Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Joseph Rawson Lumby, *Rerum Britannicarum medii aevi scriptores* ("Rolls Series") vol. 41 (1871, repr. Wiesbaden, 1964), vol. 3 [of the *Polychronicon*], pp. 161, 163. In this passage the edition differs from the British Library manuscript only in spelling.

[13] Galloway, "Chaucer's *Legend*," 824.

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significant changes in Augustine's tone or implied conclusions.[14] The next sentence in the *Polychronicon*, moreover, is a direct quotation from Augustine that Higden explicitly flags as such — a peculiar move to make without comment if the previous several dozen words had been intended to oppose him. And this is just one of several points at which Galloway's article labels as a commentator's innovation a remark that in fact derives directly from Augustine.[15] In the end it appears that the proposed group of commentators intermediate between Augustine and Chaucer, like the earlier proposals for single mediators, does not explain Chaucer's remark about *compassioun* any better than does the hypothesis that Chaucer read Augustine directly: here as there, the compassionate tendencies available in the proposed intermediaries are already present in a straightforward way in Augustine himself.

If we turn now from the secondary literature to direct readings of Augustine and Chaucer, we will discover evidence of a more positive kind for this essay's two theses — evidence that builds up to a demonstration, laid out in section four below, that Chaucer's first-hand encounter with the *City of God* is much the best available explanation for the "data" that the two texts provide. That is, such an encounter would offer excellent explanations not only for Chaucer's attribution of *compassioun*, but for a number of other peculiarities of the "Legend of

[14] Higden's Latin, according to Lumby's Rolls Series edition, reads as follows (italics added): "Hic dicunt docti quod Lucretia *non ex virtute*, sed *propter verecundiam humanam*, *et ex passionis infirmitate* seipsam occidit, cum nulla lege debeat innocens puniri, nec etiam nocens sine judice plecti. Sed quia *gens Romana maxime erat avida laudis humanae* et famae mundanae, timuit ista Lucretia quod *si superviverit* post adulterium *crederetur a populo consensisse* adulterio. Idcirco *in signum displicentiae*, ne famam amitteret aut improperium sustineret, noluit supervivere." To see how close Higden and his predecessors are staying to Augustine's ideas (and sometimes to his diction), compare the six italicized phrases with these excerpts from the passage cited in n. 3 above: "non est pudicitiae caritas"; "pudoris infirmitas"; "Romana mulier laudis avida nimium"; "si viverit"; "putaretur … libenter passa"; and perhaps "testem mentis suae." Ridevall's Latin, unpublished but partly transcribed in Galloway's article ("Chaucer's *Legend*," 831 n. 34), includes phrases corresponding to at least five of these six matches, and offers two further possible matches besides: it refers to the rape as "tante turpitudini" (cf. Augustine's "turpitudinis alienae") and as something inflicted violently ("violenter illato"; Augustine has "quod violenter est passa").

[15] For example, Galloway notes Ridevall's statement that "Roman law asserts that those killing others 'by their own authority' must be punished" and calls that Roman assertion "a point of legal history that Augustine does not mention" ("Chaucer's *Legend*," 820). But in fact Augustine mentions it twice, though not in the chapter that explicitly discusses Lucretia: the principle appears in chapters 17 and 26, with reference to Roman law in both cases. Again, the article remarks on the same page Ridevall's observation that it is unjust that Lucretia dies while Tarquin is merely exiled, without noting that the observation merely duplicates a thought from Augustine's chapter 19 (also mentioned at n. 3 above and described, in the course of explicating Augustine's "dilemma," in the main text below).

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Lucrece"; and those explanations are stronger by a long way than any that emerge from the hypothesis that Chaucer relied primarily on commentaries and excerpts.

2. Compassion and Context

The demonstration in section four, if successful, will establish this essay's first thesis. The best way to reach that goal, however, is by way of the second thesis, which is to say by showing that many modern readings of Augustine on Lucretia misrepresent the text. In particular, a detailed and relatively extensive reading of the first book of the *City of God*, put forward in this section and the next, suggests a remarkably simple explanation for Chaucer's surprising line: perhaps he credits Augustine's text with *compassioun* toward Lucretia because Augustine's text contains considerable compassion toward Lucretia. Though the notion is almost heretical against the background of current critical consensus, it arrives as the straightforward conclusion of a plain-sense reading, provided that the reading does not limit itself to the single chapter of book one in which Lucretia's name appears but takes into account the book's much longer discussion of rape and suicide in general. Such a reading reveals not only that most of the compassionate moments evident in later authors derive (as already noted) from Augustine himself, but also that his text issues other, stronger imperatives toward compassion that later summaries and commentaries entirely omit.

Here it will be helpful to step back briefly to recall the context that prompts Augustine to discuss Lucretia's story in the first place. The first ten books of the *City of God* have, it is fair to say, two major goals, both of which were prompted by the sack of Rome by Alaric's Visigoths in the year 410. Taking up the pen two or three years later, Augustine is concerned, on the one hand, to rebut the accusation that the calamity befell the seemingly impregnable city because it had abandoned its real and powerful ancestral gods — whose worship had been banned by edicts issued by the emperor Theodosius in 391–92 — in favor of the weak or simply unreal god proclaimed by Christianity. On the other hand, he also writes to console (often in ways quite reminiscent of the tradition of philosophical "consolations" like those of Seneca) the Christians of Rome after the disaster, since they, no less than everyone else, may have gone hungry, lost possessions, seen people they loved being murdered or raped, been raped themselves, and on and on.[16] The question in the background is that of theodicy, a perennial one for

[16] This is not to say that theodicy and consolation are the main content of the entire treatise; see Peter Brown's observations that "it is particularly superficial to regard [the *City of God*] as a book about the sack of Rome," and that Augustine might well have written a book contrasting God's "city" with the "human city" even had the sack never happened (Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, new edition, London, 2000 [orig. publ. 1987], 311). But the great theme of the two cities only begins in earnest with book 11; the earlier books do seem strongly motivated by questions of theodicy, even if not reducible to them.

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the Abrahamic monotheisms: how could a just and omnipotent God allow such things to happen, particularly to faithful worshipers who, their coreligionists might presume, had done nothing to earn such treatment? These two broad motivations are closely intertwined, and many passages respond to both, and Augustine only occasionally stops to point out which he is pursuing at any given moment: his style throughout the treatise is the discursive one of an orator or rhetorician. That style itself has been responsible for some of the problems in recent interpretation, as we shall see: the treatise does not aspire to the linear, quasi-mathematical transparency of language and logic sometimes found in the more purely "philosophical" works of the following centuries, from Boethius to high-medieval scholasticism. As a result accurate summary is difficult and requires attention to relatively long pieces of writing: to infer Augustine's meaning from a short excerpt is to invite misunderstanding.[17]

In the eighteen chapters that precede Lucretia's appearance, Augustine has been working through a short list of topics connected with the sack, keeping an eye on his two basic goals as he does so. The first seven chapters tell us that the (Arian Christian) Visigoths, against all expectation about the usual conduct of war, spared many Romans, both Christians and others, who had taken refuge in Christian churches, thus offering at least a partial bulwark against the accusation that the sack came about as punishment for the empire's conversion: without the conversion, Augustine argues, things would have been far worse. He then turns a bit more toward the work of consolation, taking on its unavoidable questions: why did many of the "just" suffer? Where there was relief from suffering, why did it help many of the unjust as well as the just? Can the just have benefited in any way from their own sufferings? Gradually the discussion takes the form of a list of specific calamities and the author's responses to them. What of the starvation that happened during the siege preceding the sack itself? What of the awful deaths that many suffered in the sack? What of the fact that many of the dead were not buried? What of the long captivities that many underwent?

Here quite a number of passages do double duty, in that the consolations also advance Augustine's argument that the empire's conversion was not responsible for Rome's sack. His response to the question of captivities may illustrate the point. There Augustine invokes the story of the Roman general Regulus, who was taken prisoner by the Carthaginians and eventually sent by them to Rome to negotiate for the release of Carthaginian prisoners — swearing, however,

[17] Cf. the judgment of H.-I. Marrou, "La division en chapitres des livres de *La Cité de Dieu*," *Mélanges Joseph de Ghellinck, S.J.* (Gembloux, 1951), 1: 235–49: "Augustine's text is difficult to summarize; its exposition presents itself to the reader as a continuous flow that does not easily allow itself to be cut up into sections, installments or duly labeled chapters" (249, translation mine). See further n. 32 below.

before departure that he would return if unsuccessful. On arrival he argued *against* an exchange of prisoners, apparently purely on the grounds that he thought it disadvantageous to Rome; and having persuaded the Roman Senate not to do what would have freed him, he voluntarily returned to captivity with the Carthaginians, who tortured him to death in a particularly awful way. Augustine appears deeply impressed by this pagan's outstanding virtue, but his larger point is elsewhere: since Regulus, such a devoted worshiper of the pagan gods that he would accept torture and death rather than break an oath sworn before them, underwent such a terrible captivity, the captivities recently undergone by Christians cannot serve as evidence against the reality, strength, or providential involvement of the Christian god. Anyone tempted to invoke them in that way finds himself caught by one of the dilemmas on which Augustine's rhetorical style frequently relies: either we expect religious worship to provide the worshiper, here in this present life, with "external goods" like health, wealth, and long life, in which case the pagan gods of Regulus cannot be any more real, or more powerful, than those of the Christians who underwent less severe misfortunes; or we do not, in which case none of the misfortunes that befall individuals or cities can count as evidence for the reality or unreality, or the strength or weakness, of their gods.[18]

Augustine then turns to the last item on his list of misfortunes, and the one that will inspire the appeal to Lucretia: not only were Christians held captive for long periods, but some were raped, and among the victims were not only married women and young women bound for marriage but "virgines sanctimoniales," women much like the nuns of today, consecrated to lifelong virginity for the sake of their religion. "They," that is the pagan opponents of Christianity, "suppose that they cast a great accusation against Christians" in relating those attacks, Augustine says (1.16), meaning that here they ask the skeptic's question

[18] DCD 1.15. The actual unfolding of the argument there is, as usual, more complicated. Augustine first constructs roughly the dilemma described above between the expectation of rewards in this present life and that of rewards arriving only in an afterlife, then introduces as a hypothetical way out of the dilemma the notion of goods other than external ones: perhaps Regulus's superlative virtue allowed him to be happy (*beatus*) even under torture — a position that requires Augustine to entertain at least for the sake of argument something like the Stoic position that real happiness can be attained in this life, but that it is a matter of personal virtue rather than external goods and hence cannot be lost by ill fortune. But he then concludes that he need not resolve the question of whether Regulus was in fact virtuous in that way, since claiming that right worship is rewarded in this present life, but by virtue rather than by external goods, would block the inference from the suffering of Christians to the "unrightness" of Christian worship just as effectively as would the deferral of all rewards to an afterlife. As he puts it, "it suffices for now that they [the imagined pagan interlocutors] are driven by that very well-known [or extremely noble] example to say that the gods are not to be worshiped for the sake of goods of the body or of those things that befall a person from without" (sufficit nunc, quod isto nobilissimo exemplo coguntur fateri non propter corporis bona vel earum rerum, quae extrinsecus homini accidunt, colendos deos).

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with renewed force: surely a god who was real, just, and powerful would not allow *this*?

In the background of Augustine's response, which goes on for several chapters, is an idea about morality and suffering that underlies the rest of the "consolation" he offers, and indeed the whole tradition of consolation on which he draws: the idea that external goods or goods of the body are not what count as "true riches," not what is most important about human life, not what must be most desperately mourned if lost.[19] That background belief is surely the reason that the first sentence of his response is a postulate about passivity, activity, and ethics: "Let it therefore in the first place be laid down and held firmly that the virtue by which one lives rightly governs the body's members from the seat of the mind [*animus*], and that the body is made holy by the habitual practice of a holy will — and that when that will is unshaken and remains stable, anything another may do, with respect to the body or in the body, that could not be avoided without a sin of one's own, is without guilt of the one suffering" (1.16).[20] Whatever else the victims of rape may have lost, they did not lose "holiness," because it is impossible for a person to lose that by anything that happens to her or him; they did not incur any guilt. And Augustine specifies, in a bolder claim to which he will return many times, that not even their bodies were damaged in a way that would matter most essentially. They too remain "holy," since the body's holiness derives from the mind and persists, no matter what happens *to* the body, as long as the mind wills to act well. The next three chapters largely work out and emphasize the implications of this fundamental postulate: at least on the earthly plane, a person's most important attributes — goodness, holiness, presumably also virtue — are matters of what she does, not what she suffers.[21]

[19] See, for example, chapter 10, where such external goods are compared unfavorably to "the riches of Christians," which are faith, piety, and the goods of the interior person. There are, to be sure, differences between Augustine and his non-Christian sources (likewise his imagined non-Christian interlocutors) on the question of what exactly *is* most important in human life. The tradition of Stoic consolation would point to personal wisdom or virtue, whereas for Augustine virtues are in general valuable but limited aids along one's path to a greater goal, namely "eternal life." For a useful introduction to the difference, see John Marenbon, *Pagans and Philosophers: The Problem of Paganism from Augustine to Leibniz* (Princeton, 2015), 35–36. But in the case of rape victims as in that of Regulus (see previous note), Augustine finds a minimal common ground with his interlocutors that allows him to advance his argument without settling a finer point: whatever the ultimate goal of human life, all those he imagines as parties to the discussion agree that the goal cannot be lost by suffering something inflicted by another human.

[20] "Sit igitur in primis positum atque firmatum virtutem, qua recte vivitur, ab animi sede membris corporis imperare sanctumque corpus usu fieri sanctae voluntatis, qua inconcussa ac stabili permanente, quidquid alius de corpore vel in corpore fecerit, quod sine peccato proprio non valeat evitari, praeter culpam esse patientis."

[21] The qualification about the "earthly plane" is necessary because, as already hinted, if the question were put to him directly Augustine would surely affirm that the most important

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It is the desire to support this postulate that first brings Lucretia into the discussion. At the beginning of chapter 19 Augustine asks rhetorically whether his imagined interlocutors — those "against whom we defend not only the minds but even the bodies of those Christian women raped in captivity as holy" — will "dare to contradict the clear reasoning" by which he has argued that in the rape of a person whose "intention of chastity" remained unchanged, the disgrace belongs only to the rapist, not the victim. But surely, he answers himself, the interlocutors could not thus contradict him, given that they raise up Lucretia, "the well-known [or noble] Roman matron of a former time, with praises of [her] great chastity."[22] She too was raped, in other words, and Rome redounds with the praise of her virtue; that historical fact should suffice, even if reasoning has failed, to show that the Christians in a similar situation must be judged equally innocent, that they have lost nothing of the virtue and holiness that was their most important earthly possession. Augustine then retells Lucretia's tale in two sentences, following them with a striking affirmation of her chastity in the form of another rhetorical question:

> When the son of king Tarquin had lustfully become master of her violently seized body, she made known the evil deed of the most vile youth to her spouse Collatine and her kinsman Brutus, men very honorable and steadfast, and constrained them to vengeance. Then, grieving over and unable to bear the abominable thing committed against her, she killed herself. What are we to say? Is she to be judged an adulteress or chaste? Who could think it necessary to labor in this debate?

Here again Augustine will answer his own question, this time by quoting the observation of an unknown commentator. At the moment of the rape, this commentator says, "there were two [present], and one became guilty of adultery" — a remark Augustine festoons with laudatory adverbs: it has been said "uncommonly well" and "truly," "splendidly" and "most accurately."[23]

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thing that can happen in a person's life is the reception of "eternal life" as a "grace" or "gift" from God — a process which, though clearly involving acts of the human will in Augustine's mature treatments of it, must be initiated on God's side, and at least to that extent should be reckoned as "passive" from the point of view of the human. But here we can bracket that all-important passivity and consider only passivities imposed by creatures, including physical attacks and other kinds of suffering; Augustine's point is that these do not determine guilt or innocence, nor shape a person as deeply as do his or her acts of will.

[22] The first two sentences of chapter 19 read in full: "An forte huic perspicuae rationi, qua dicimus corpore oppresso nequaquam proposito castitatis ulla in malum consensione mutato illius tantum esse flagitium, qui opprimens concuberit, non illius, quae oppressa concumbenti nulla voluntate consenserit, contradicere audebunt hi, contra quos feminarum Christianarum in captivitate oppressarum non tantum mentes, verum etiam corpora sancta defendimus? Lucretiam certe, matronam nobilem veteremque Romanam, pudicitiae magnis efferunt laudibus."

[23] DCD 1.19, beginning from the block quotation: "Huius corpore cum violenter oppresso Tarquinii regis filius libidinose potitus esset, illa scelus improbissimi iuvenis

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From this brief summary of the context there already arises an obvious challenge to the more or less standard way in which recent readers have represented Augustine's treatment of Lucretia. The "cruel dilemma" on which he hooks her later in the chapter is actually not much of a dilemma, given that he has forcefully declared which side he is on long before mentioning the dilemma itself. Lucretia is innocent of any unchastity, in his view; the first aim with which he introduces her into his book would be impeded if she were not. He has brought her in, at least initially, for reasons more or less parallel to those that inspired the introduction of Regulus. Just as fair-thinking pagans could not assert that captivities inflicted on Christians demonstrate the falseness of the Christian god when their own stories show that most faithful of pagan worshipers suffering things still worse, so here: no pagan can suggest that the Christian rape victims have lost what is most important, their holiness or virtue, while still continuing to trumpet Lucretia's chastity. And in each case Augustine willingly ratifies the positive judgment that the pagans make about their moral champion.

Where, then, does the cruel dilemma come in? It is connected to Augustine's discursive style. Having introduced Lucretia to his argument with one apparent aim, he has no qualms about then developing quite another line of thought, with a different conclusion, from her presence. The second conclusion is simple enough: it is that the Christian victims under discussion are in fact more virtuous than Lucretia, not less. It would be fair, in fact, to characterize this development as a contribution to a third goal of the first ten books of the treatise, supplementary to the goals of consolation and of clearing Christianity of blame for the sack: Augustine simply wants to show that Christian morality is generally superior to pagan morality. Thus he will go on to argue that the Christian victims of rape who, "having suffered similar things, nonetheless live (quae passae similia vivunt tamen)" (1.19), have reacted in a better way than Lucretia. It is the motion toward this third use of the story that brings Augustine to his dilemma, which he presents, if not quite as a full-blown counterfactual, then at least as something like a thought experiment.[24]

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marito Collatino et propinquo Bruto, viris clarissimis et fortissimis, indicavit eosque ad vindictam constrinxit. Deinde foedi in se commissi aegra atque inpatiens se peremit. Quid dicemus? Adultera haec an casta iudicanda sit? Quis in hac controversia laborandum putaverit? Egregie quidam ex hoc veraciterque declamans ait: 'Mirabile dictu, duo fuerunt et adulterium unus admisit.' Splendide atque verissime." The second pair of laudatory adverbs could perhaps (despite the editor's punctuation) modify the following word, *intuens*, rather than *ait*, but that change would not affect the conclusions here.

[24] In truth the introduction of Lucretia's story also serves Augustine for yet a fourth purpose: it gives him occasion for an eight-chapter exposition of the immorality of suicide. Those chapters (20–27) do fit with his intent to show the superiority of Christian morals, since suicide was for him a point of sharp disagreement with the pagans. But the chapters are surely directed to Christians as well. There was, first of all, the Donatist movement

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The experiment works this way. After his forceful declaration of Lucretia's chastity, Augustine begins to muse: given that she is chaste, is it not strange and unjust that of the two people involved, it is the innocent one who was killed while the guilty Tarquin was merely exiled? Should you, O Romans, so proud of the justice of your laws and the equity of your legal system, not want to punish a person who inflicted such an extreme penalty, without authority to do so or due process, even on a guilty person, let alone on one who deserved no penalty at all? But that is what Lucretia has done to herself. *Unless* of course (and here arises the dilemma) you think that she was not innocent of adultery after all: "Or perhaps … she did not kill herself guiltless, but knowing evil of herself? For what if (which only she herself could know) — although to a young man who forced himself in violently — she also consented, allured by her own sensual desire, and, in avenging it on herself, she so lamented it that she supposed that it ought to be expiated by death?"[25] One aim of the surrounding argument is

against which several of Augustine's early works were written; its members, adherents of strict moral codes in many realms, sometimes escaped the threat of various profanations by suicide, and venerated as saints those of their number who had done so. But there are also occasional suggestions in writers Augustine and the subsequent tradition rated more highly (notably Jerome, Ambrose, and perhaps Tertullian) of an attitude toward suicide more permissive, under the right circumstances, than Augustine's own — the "right circumstances" sometimes being an attempt to escape from threatened rape. It is worth noting that Christianity after Augustine's time tended to side with his absolute ban on suicide except where a direct divine command is involved, but that at least in Augustine himself, as will be manifest here, condemnation of the sin need not preclude either praise of the sinner in other matters or the thinkability of forgiveness. Further discussion appears in Alexander Murray, *The Curse on Self-Murder*, vol. 2 of *Suicide in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2000); for the motivations behind Augustine's writings on the topic, see especially 105–7, 110, 113. More on Jerome's attitude, including the possibility that the *City of God* responds directly to Jerome's treatment of Lucretia in his *Adversus Jovinianum*, appears in my *God's Patients: Chaucer, Agency, and the Nature of Laws* (Notre Dame, IN, 2019), 227–28. The suggestions in Ambrose (and perhaps Jerome as well) seem largely motivated by the need to take account of early Christians who killed themselves to avoid rape and were later honored as martyrs; for the case of St. Pelagia, see Ambrose, *De virginibus / Über die Jungfrauen*, trans. Peter Dückers, Fontes Christiani 81 (Turnhout, 2009), 3.7.32–38, 224–35. A useful account of these complications, including also good introductory information on the Donatists, appears in *La cité de Dieu*, Livres I–V, trans. G. Combès, Ouevres de Saint Augustin 5th series, vol. 33 (Paris, 2014 [orig. publ. 1959]), 775–77. Finally, for an introduction to Tertullian's brief positive invocation of Lucretia, see Robert J. Goar, *The Legend of Cato Uticensis from the First Century B.C. to the Fifth Century A.D.*, Collection Latomus 197 (Brussels, 1987), 78–79; a slightly fuller summary with references appears in Eleanor Glendinning, "Reinventing Lucretia: Rape, Suicide and Redemption from Classical Antiquity to the Medieval Era," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 20 (2013): 61–82, at 68–69.

[25] DCD 1.19: "An forte [ideo ibi non est, quia] non insontem, sed male sibi consciam se peremit? Quid si enim (quod ipsa tantummodo nosse poterat) quamvis iuveni violenter inruenti etiam sua libidine inlecta consensit idque in se puniens ita doluit, ut morte putaret expiandum?" Augustine's statement of the dilemma does not support, it seems to

to establish that Lucretia's killing herself was a moral mistake, an instance of wrong-doing. That it is for Augustine also an understandable instance we will see in the next section; but nonetheless the wrong-doing means, he will conclude soon after, that when the Roman heroine is held up for comparison with the recent Christian victims, the latter come out in the lead. And the only way to lessen the magnitude of Lucretia's crime against herself would be by supposing that there was after all a previous crime to avenge — in which case Lucretia would still be less admirable than the pagans say, though for a different reason. Hence, as Augustine puts it a few sentences later, "this case is hemmed in from both sides."[26]

But immediately on making that observation he pulls himself up short, turning back from the comparison of moral systems to the general argument about chastity with which he first introduced Lucretia: "Nonetheless it suffices for us, in this case, so well known, of this woman — to refute those who, not understanding any deliberation about holiness, revile the Christian women who were lain with in captivity — that it has been said in the celebrated commendation of her: 'There were two and one committed adultery.' For by them Lucretia has rather been believed to be of a kind who could not stain herself by any adulterous consent."[27] Although Augustine does not here repeat the declaration from the chapter's beginning that he agrees with "them" about Lucretia, we do clearly find ourselves back in that

me, Peter Brown's remark that he "piles on innuendoes against the chastity of Lucretia" (*Augustine*, 308). The accusation of "piling on" is misplaced, for one thing, as it is only in these two sentences and the passage cited in the following note that Augustine says anything all that could be construed as impugning her chastity. And it is difficult to take these sentences as containing a serious suggestion, or even innuendo, given the hypothetical context in which they arise and the repeated declarations of chastity that precede and follow. (Further consideration of exactly what kind of consent Augustine may have had in mind here appears in n. 49 below.)

[26] It is important to notice that, though the two recent English translations (n. 2 above) are incorrect on the point, for Augustine the crime of suicide would be *lessened* ("extenuatur") by preceding unchastity, but not excused. Killing the guilty is, for him, a crime less monstrous than killing the innocent, but it does not cease to be a crime (compare n. 35 below). The relevant sentence concludes the second and final passage (this one also two sentences long) in which Augustine makes any mention of the possibility of unchastity. It reads: "This case is hemmed in from both sides, so that, if the homicide is diminished, the adultery is established; if the adultery is cleansed away, the homicide is increased; and no way out at all will be found when it is said: 'if she was defiled, why has she been praised? If she was chaste, why was she killed?'" The Latin reads: "Sed ita haec causa ex utroque latere coartatur, ut, si extenuatur homicidium, adulterium confirmatur; si purgatur adulterium, homicidium cumuletur; nec omnino invenitur exitus, ubi dicitur: 'Si adulterata, cur laudata; si pudica, cur occisa?'" (DCD 1.19).

[27] "Nobis tamen in hoc tam nobili feminae huius exemplo ad istos refutandos, qui Christianis feminis in captivitate compressis alieni ab omni cogitatione sanctitatis insultant, sufficit quod in praeclaris eius laudibus dictum est: 'Duo fuerunt et adulterium unus admisit.' Talis enim ab eis Lucretia magis credita est, quae se nullo adulterino potuerit maculare consensu."

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space, where Lucretia is invoked as the example whose reputation for chastity will convince, and convince even those unreceptive to other arguments, that there is no guilt in being a victim. The dilemma has done its work and can be put aside, revealed as a bit of a red herring, more a matter of looking down every possible pathway than of a possibility that Augustine seriously entertains.

Thus the explicit treatment of Lucretia in the *City of God* is less cruel, less eager to entrap its hapless subject in one kind of condemnation or another, than it has often been made out to be. Augustine is even ready to praise her for the virtue of chastity, just as he praises Regulus for his steadfastness in keeping faith — a willingness made only more remarkable by the surrounding polemic against the culture in which both lived. Augustine is also adamant about the innocence of those victimized by another's will, a point that may strike us as obvious but that he clearly thought needed defending, given the amount of space he devotes to it. Nonetheless, however much less ferocious these bits of contextualization make him appear, one might fairly observe that they fall short of justifying a verdict of *gret compassioun*, which should require more than the simple absence of cruelty. To see what might inspire Augustine's reader to that verdict, we need to look more deeply at what he says not about Lucretia's particular case, but about rape in general, and especially at how he thinks it differs from other crimes.

3. What Augustine Really Said about Rape

Augustine's great concern to declare that no one can become guilty or lose "holiness" of mind or body by anything that happens *to* her or him has been stressed enough. But immediately after the above-remarked strong statement of that ethical postulate (1.16), Augustine adds that sexual assault raises a special complication in this regard. Because "not only that which pertains to pain but that which pertains to sensual desire can be perpetrated on another's body," there is the risk that the victim will be thought to have been seduced by pleasure into a secret assent, thus getting her own will entangled in the crime and incurring guilt after all. It is that possibility, Augustine thinks, that gives rise to the shame that victims often feel, even when no such assent has happened: "Whatever of this sort [i.e., sexual assault] may be done, although it does not drive out chastity [or "shamefastness": *pudicitia*] that has been preserved by dint of a most constant spirit, nonetheless inspires shame [*pudor*] lest it be believed that what perhaps cannot happen without some pleasure of the flesh happened also with the will of the mind."[28]

[28] DCD 1.16. The two quotations are continuous, reading: "Sed quia non solum quod ad dolorem, verum etiam quod ad libidinem pertinet, in corpore alieno perpetrari potest: quidquid tale factum fuerit, etsi retentam constantissimo animo pudicitiam non excutit, tamen

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That account of victim's shame is surely far too simple.[29] Nonetheless it is worth pausing a moment to appreciate what Augustine has said, and even more what he has not said. He has not said that rape victims commonly *do* find themselves assenting to the criminal assault. He has not even said that such a thing has ever happened. It is merely a matter of the possibility that third parties learning about a particular rape may imagine that it has happened. And, to be still more precise, Augustine does not even directly assert *that* possibility: what he says is that victims often *fear* that third parties may imagine that a secret assent happened. Thus his concern is, as far as I can tell, entirely sympathetic with the plight of rape victims. And it is sympathetic both in a general sense and a precise etymological one: it is an attempt to understand and describe what a rape victim experiences, to feel-and-suffer-with her.

To this point his efforts have all been on the level of factual description. What follows next is the "ought," the moral response expected of bystanders, and it is if anything still more remarkable. "But on account of this," Augustine writes, "even those women who have killed themselves lest they suffer something of this sort — what human feeling would not wish to forgive them? And those women who declined to kill themselves, lest they avoid another's disgraceful act by a misdeed of their own — whoever imputes this to them as an accusation will not himself ward off the accusation of being a fool."[30] Strong words in themselves, but much stronger when one considers their full context: that of an already famous and authoritative bishop who is about to reinforce his own emphatic declaration that suicide is sinful with another eight chapters on the subject, drawing his conclusions there in large part directly from the Decalogue. And yet here, a few chapters before that discussion begins, he offers a qualification: *even if* some

pudorem incutit, ne credatur factum cum mentis etiam voluntate, quod fieri fortasse sine carnis aliqua voluptate non potuit."

[29] For comparing Augustine's work with the lived experience of rape victims as understood in recent decades, a helpful, challenging, and even appropriately painful starting point is Mary Pellauer, "Augustine on Rape: One Chapter in the Theological Tradition," *Violence against Women and Children: A Christian Theological Sourcebook*, ed. Carol J. Adams and Marie J. Fortune (New York, 1995), 207–41. The anger (her word) Pellauer experienced at reading Augustine against the background of reports from people who work with rape victims gives the essay an ethical urgency rare in academic writing: it demands, and deserves, to be heard. Nonetheless there are some limitations and inaccuracies in its reading of Augustine that also demand recognition: a few are remarked in n. 33 below.

[30] "Ac per hoc et quae se occiderunt ne quicquam huius modi paterentur, quis humanus adfectus eis nolit ignosci? Et quae se occidere noluerunt, ne suo facinore alienum flagitium deuitarent, quisquis eis hoc crimine dederit, ipse crimen insipientiae non cauebit" (1.17). The verb *nolle*, which Augustine uses twice here, can mean "to wish not to," "not to wish to," or "to refuse or decline to." Clearly the second or third meaning is operative in each case; the choice does not affect the argument above. *Humanus*, for its part, might be translated with the English word *humane* rather than *human*.

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woman does commit this serious sin, if it comes about under the awful duress imposed by sexual assault, we will, and should, want to forgive her. More: to want anything else is inhuman. It is hard not to see here a clear and forceful expression of sympathy (in both the loose and the etymological sense) for the victim — sympathy and, yes, compassion. In fact the word I have translated as "feeling," *adfectus*, generally has a positive rather than a neutral valence, and thus instead of "human feeling" the phrase could easily be rendered "human compassion."

Augustine's sympathy does not, to be sure, alter his judgment that suicide — any suicide not divinely mandated, and thus of course Lucretia's — is sinful. But it does provide, for her case and others like it, a frame that cannot be overlooked.[31] It reminds the reader that to say that someone has committed a sin is not, for a Christian theologian, to condemn the person irrevocably. It is, in fact, merely to say that the person is human, as in general the religion takes rather seriously the various biblical declarations that "all have sinned" ("omnes enim peccaverunt" [Romans 3:23]; cf. Romans 3:10–18, a passage that reproduces several verses on the theme from the Hebrew scriptures, and also 1 John 1:8–2:2). Thus there is no contradiction between pointing out someone's sin and exercising compassion toward her or him; in fact if one is not going to be compassionate toward sinners, one is not going to be compassionate at all, as there is no one else available

[31] Readers may be tempted to object that the particular instance of sympathy described in the preceding paragraph does not self-evidently apply to Lucretia's case, because at least at first reading it seems focused on women who commit suicide to avoid being raped, not after rape happens. But two pages later, at the end of his longest argument that a woman who in no way consents to rape remains holy in mind and body and has nothing that she is "punishing in herself" or "avenging against herself" by "voluntary death" ("non habet quod in se morte spontanea puniat," DCD 1.18), Augustine adds, "quanto minus antequam hoc fiat!" — how much less before [the rape] happens! If it is a mistake and a sin for rape victims to commit suicide, in other words, it is still more so for those who have not yet suffered rape. But in that case it is women in the latter situation who have *less* claim to Augustine's sympathy, while actual victims like Lucretia have more: it seems, at least in this passage, to be one step more understandable that an actual victim would make the mistake of taking her own life. Victims, after all, can be expected to suffer after the fact in the way that Augustine has described, namely from a natural reaction of shame that he believes is based in a fear of being suspected of secret assent. (The fact that he finds this shame not only an understandable but a natural, which is to say an involuntary and passive, reaction is attested by his remark that an assault "inspires shame," or even "strikes shame into" the victim; the Latin is *pudorem incutit* [n. 28 above]. Thus Lucretia's error is not that she experiences shame, but that she responds wrongly to it.) Given all this, and given Augustine's clearly conscious distinction between the two types of case (cf. also chap. 24 *ad fin.*), it is even possible that the sentences quoted in the preceding paragraph have been intentionally left vague enough to cover both types. Grammatically the "something of this sort" (quicquam huius modi) that women who are tempted toward self-murder seek to avoid could refer either to rape itself or to the shame that follows it.

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to receive the gift. The distinction between hated sins and beloved sinners makes possible the complexity of Augustine's reaction to Lucretia, the fact that he can praise her virtue and have compassion on her plight while still asserting that she sinned; critics who miss the distinction, or who do not believe that it could be sincere, will quite naturally also disbelieve the complexity. For that matter, a simple failure to read, or remember, these lines from Augustine's seventeenth chapter would have the same effect, as they do not merely mitigate the negative things said two chapters later; they transform their meaning.[32] After the directive that we should want to forgive, a condemnation of a particular victim's suicide cannot come across primarily as intended to condemn the *victim*. Quite the opposite: the condemnation itself can be read as yet another expression of compassion. It is at least partly aimed at keeping other victims from harming themselves further.

In the face of these several strong exhibitions of sympathy, it is fair to ask how so many contemporary readers have concluded that Chaucer's remark about *compassioun* is not only wrong but obviously and unquestionably so,[33] and how it is that

[32] As already hinted, critics who have come to the *City of God* to investigate Chaucer's remark about it have often made the mistake of thinking the question can be decided merely by a reading of chapter 19: the twentieth-century writers discussed here only rarely refer to any other chapter. In this connection it is worth bearing in mind that each of the "books" of Augustine's text was through most of its history presented as a continuous stream, punctuated at most by line breaks and numbers (generally marginal if present at all) for the individual chapters. The short descriptions of each chapter now commonly used as chapter headings were, in most manuscripts and the earliest editions, either absent or collected at the beginning of the treatise or of a group of several "books"; the practice of breaking up the textual flow by inserting them into the main text dates only from the sixteenth century. See Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 302 nn. 3–4, and again Marrou, "La division en chapitres" (n. 17 above). Marrou's judgment of the implications for reading nicely matches those suggested here: "One must read [Augustine] as he wished to be read.... Each book presents itself as a totality, and it is certain that in Augustine's own thinking the book is the literary unit ... one must read each of them as a whole, as an enormous symphonic piece whose development no fermata comes to interrupt, and which, in truth, it would be barbarous to split up" (249, translation mine).

[33] Sample reports of Augustine as noncompassionate appear in nn. 4–6 and 8 above and nn. 46 and 48 below; a standout instance is Delany's characterization in *The Naked Text* (p. 204; see n. 6 above) of Augustine's retelling of the story as a "diatribe" against Lucretia. To reach that conclusion, however, Delaney's treatment goes beyond even the frequent practice of discussing chapter 19 in isolation from the twelve surrounding relevant chapters; it also handles the evidence of chapter 19 itself selectively. For example, its reproduction of nearly a full page of text from the chapter, which gives the impression of offering a sufficient survey of Augustine's account, in fact omits both the crucial line "there were two [present] and one became guilty of adultery" (even though it appears four times in the three-page chapter and is introduced with the strong approval noted above) and the sentences near the beginning that declare Lucretia's chastity in Augustine's own voice, thus making clear that his "dilemma" is merely a kind of thought experiment.

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Two more pieces that return on the whole a negative verdict about the ideas in DCD 1 deserve special mention for the unusual complexity of their readings. One is Amy Greenstadt's "Rapt from Himself: Rape and the Poetics of Corporeality in Sidney's *Old Arcadia*," in *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (New York, 2001), 311–49, which refreshingly attributes to Augustine's views troubles different from those most frequently found there. However, many of the article's striking claims about theology and the history of European thought are advanced with insufficient evidence. Occasionally the result seems flatly incorrect, as when the article attributes to Jerome and Ambrose, without any more specific reference, the position that virgins could commit suicide "in order to resist the threat of rape, since once virginity was lost the status of sexual and spiritual purity it offered could never be regained" (344 n. 25). In fact the reasons these two writers had for entertaining exceptions to the ban on self-murder appear to have been otherwise (n. 24 above); neither makes any mention, at least in the most obviously relevant passages, of the idea that follows Greenstadt's "since." At other points the sparseness of evidence leaves us with a claim that is nearly impossible to evaluate, as with the complex assertion that, while Augustine's emphasis on the difference between chastity and physical virginity eventually allowed for a focus on women's consent that "seemed to constitute a public acknowledgment of women's rights to self-determination" (316), he also harbored "notions of female subjectivity and virtue" that were "no less limited than" that of previous theologians who allegedly took "purity," physical virginity, and the "lack of all erotic thoughts" as conditions inseparably bound together (316, 314). But no evidence is offered for the earlier theologians' view, and to support its account of Augustine's own ideas the article — constrained, to be sure, by the fact that its primary goal is an argument about Sir Philip Sidney — brings forward data that seem to me sufficient to start a discussion, but not to establish the stated claim.

The second article is Pellauer's "Augustine on Rape," which has come closer than any other treatment to stopping my own reading in its tracks; its criticisms (occasionally paired with appreciations) will make anyone think carefully about whether to judge Augustine's stance as a whole compassionate, even once the instances of sympathy remarked in the main text above are recognized. Ideally the article should be brought into extended dialogue with a more exact reading of Augustine than it itself provides, an exercise that would likely alter positions on both sides. As a compact approximation to that work, I would like to note, first, a certain selectivity: when discussing the "dilemma," for example, the article mentions neither Augustine's previous declaration of Lucretia's chastity nor his observation that anyone of human feeling will desire to forgive a rape victim who kills herself. Second are a number of overstatements and simple inaccuracies. There is a blanket declaration, presumably based on the above-mentioned passages in Jerome and Ambrose but surely too strong, that "early Christian ethics favored suicide in the face of rape" (207). There is a repeated conflation (220, 230, 232) of the possibility of pleasure with consent, as if Augustine believed that the experience of pleasure, if it should happen in a rape victim, inevitably implied consent and thus guilt; in fact his whole mechanism of enjoyment and consent (n. 49 below) is meant to demonstrate the opposite, since enjoyment is often passive but consent must be active. And there is an emphatic castigation of Augustine for another thing he does not say: "Worst was the statement that rape *could not* be suffered without some pleasure" (216, emphasis original; the problem seems to arise externally, from Pellauer's reliance on the translation of Marcus Dods [Edinburg, 1872, repr. New York, 1950], which unaccountably omits Augustine's "perhaps" from the passage given at n. 28 above; Pellauer's citation reintroduces the word, in brackets, but in a place where it modifies the wrong phrase). Correcting these and some similar misreadings might ease, at least to some extent, Pellauer's overall reaction to the text, while leaving some of her important objections intact.

one infrequently finds critics saying anything else.[34] As with the often incomplete understandings of his dilemma concerning Lucretia, at least part of the blame can be laid at the door of a discursive style that several times leads Augustine to the brink of saying something rather horrible to modern sensibilities — leads him, indeed, so close to the horrible thing that hurried readers, particularly if they do not drink in the entire context, may easily come away thinking it has actually been said. For example, one who reads in isolation the statement that "a woman violently overcome and oppressed by another's sin, without any consent of her own, does not have anything that she is avenging against herself by voluntary death" (1.18) may easily form the impression that Augustine intends also the logical "inverse," namely that a woman who *did* secretly consent to an assault and then killed herself *was* avenging something against herself and was therefore justified

[34] An exception is Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and Its Transformations* (Oxford, 1982); while Donaldson's presentation requires adjustment in some other areas, he seems to me correct in observing a "central, humane tendency of Augustine's argument" that various modern-period writers have disregarded. Warren S. Smith, "Dorigen's Lament and the Resolution of the Franklin's Tale," *Chaucer Review* 36 (2002): 374–90, also finds genuine sympathy in Augustine's treatment (388), but the article's focus elsewhere does not allow it space to weigh evidence for and against the finding. As already remarked, Robert Worth Frank's older *Chaucer and the Legend* (n. 5 above) likewise argues for a compassionate Augustine, but draws on evidence unlikely to convince the skeptical. Rachel Warburton, "Reading Rape in Chaucer: Or Are Cecily, Lucretia, and Philomela *Good Women*?" in *Diversifying the Discourse: The Florence Howe Award for Outstanding Feminist Scholarship, 1990–2004* (New York, 2006), 270–88, rightly observes that Augustine "sympathizes at least partially with [Lucretia's] plight" (276–77); but she also reads back onto Augustine ideas about rape that do not appear in Augustine himself (see n. 49 below). Elizabeth Robertson's "Public Bodies and Psychic Domains: Rape, Consent, and Female Subjectivity in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Representing Rape* (see Greenstadt in preceding note), 281–310, while not speaking directly to the question of Augustine's compassion for Lucretia, does credit him with a generally positive impact on how women were seen in cases of rape (283, 296–97); she attributes to him, however, a greater degree of originality in asserting women's autonomy than was likely the case, given the generally high view of women in, for example, ancient Stoicism. (She also incorrectly asserts that Augustine believes that rape "by necessity involves carnal satisfaction" [297]; likely the source of the error is Marcus Dods's translation, as is the case with Pellauer's "Augustine on Rape.") Finally, Melanie Webb, "On Lucretia Who Slew Herself: Rape and Consolation in Augustine," *Augustinian Studies* 44 (2013): 37–58, attempts a thoroughgoing defense of Augustine's attitude toward Lucretia, among other things helpfully noting the importance of the parallel with Regulus and raising worthwhile questions about the relations among *voluptas*, *libido*, and *voluntas*. But the article's answers to those questions are occasionally skewed, it seems to me, by its failure even to mention the much-discussed "dilemma" (n. 26 above). Doing so would have required it to come to terms with Augustine's belief in at least the logical possibility — for all that he never says that it has happened in any particular case and denies it in Lucretia's — that *libido* could arise in a rape victim and that *voluptas* might tempt a victim into some form of voluntary consent (on which see also DCD 1.25 *ad fin.*). In the absence of those recognitions, the article's portrait of Augustine seems a bit more in line with a version of modern feminist sensibilities than the historical bishop actually was.

in the suicide. But a more careful reading, taking into account the broader context, makes it abundantly clear that Augustine means nothing of the kind. Although, as already remarked, he does believe that the killing of an innocent person (oneself or another) is a *worse* crime than the killing of a wicked one, both kinds of killing — bracketing the highly regulated situations of military action and judicial execution, and the rare and risky possibility of direct divine command — remain clearly forbidden.[35]

A second example of a tempting misreading is important to note because, though small and subtle in itself, it is capable of discoloring all the light in which Augustine's attitude toward pagan Roman culture appears. Readers sometimes look at the first passage from Augustine quoted in the present essay, the one connecting Lucretia's suicide with *pudoris infirmitas* rather than *pudicitatis caritas*, and infer that the essential problem with Lucretia's suicide was that it was motivated by shame — as if, again, a suicide motivated by love for lost chastity would have been permissible. But here as in the previous case, Augustine has not said what has been heard, and a reading of the surrounding chapters makes clear that he intends something very different.[36] The problem with Lucretia's suicide is simply that it is suicide, and for Augustine suicide, regardless of circumstances or motivation (barring his single exception, irrelevant here), is a sin. In fact it is not even clear that Lucretia's motivation by shame has made her crime worse in Augustine's eyes. Here the analysis becomes regrettably grim, but its logic seems to proceed as follows: since killing the guilty, while still criminal, is judged to be less bad than killing the innocent, a suicide motivated by an accurate perception of prior guilt would be a lesser crime than Lucretia's suicide. But it does not follow that the shame that (according to Augustine) motivated the latter is what has made the crime worse: Lucretia's innocence has done

[35] At 1.17; see also 1.21 and 1.26 *ad fin.*; for the previous "remark" here, see n. 26, which notes some mistranslations that likely contribute to confusion on this point. Galloway's article is one of those that ascribe the logical inverse: "Augustine and many other medieval writers persistently maintained the possibility of [Lucretia's] 'secret consent' to the rape as the one justifiable reason they could imagine for her consigning herself to death" ("Chaucer's *Legend*" [n. 8 above], 817–18). I have not located any medieval writers who make such a statement. Augustine himself certainly denies it — with greatest force in the discussion of suicide that occupies chapters 20–27. The passage quoted from DCD 1.18 reads: "Non habet quod in se morte spontanea puniat femina sine ulla sua consensione violenter oppressa et alieno conpressa peccato."

[36] Again Galloway's article makes the declaration clearly, if only in passing. Augustine, it asserts, had "determined that Lucretia's suicide made her sinful because she displays the Roman 'excessive zeal for praise'" ("Chaucer's *Legend*," 814). The two clauses involved are correct and faithful to Augustine's text — he does think the suicide makes her sinful, and that she is too interested in praise — but the *because* that connects them is not: there is no suggestion in the treatise that Lucretia's "zeal" causes either the sinfulness of the act or Augustine's judgment about it.

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that. The shame, in fact, may well weigh in on the opposite side, by helping to give an account of *why* this woman, whose chastity Augustine has long since ratified and the awfulness of whose plight he has considered at length, has reacted wrongly to her wretched situation. In that case his notion about Roman eagerness for praise functions not as an argument for the prosecution, but as a mitigating explanation offered by the defense, a cultural background that tells why the wrong choice might come easily to this otherwise admirable person. Such an interpretation would not conflict with Augustine's clear interest in showing the superiority of Christian morality and culture to their Roman competitors; it would merely mean that he distinguishes between a culture and the people who inhabit it, and is quite capable of pointing to weaknesses in the former without issuing blanket condemnations of the latter. It would mean, in other words, that his invocation of Lucretia's fear of shame functions as yet another summons to compassion for her.[37]

It should now be clear that, so far from being ripe for out-of-hand dismissal, Chaucer's remark about *compassioun* is quite a plausible one; what he means is even evident on the surface of Augustine's text. All its discussion about rape victims in general, before Lucretia makes her entrance, lays a foundation for an account of Lucretia herself that is in many ways laudatory and sympathetic, despite the polemical context that helps inspire criticism along with the praise. It is worth calling again to mind the powerful sentence with which Augustine ends her story: "foedi in se commissi aegra atque impatiens se peremit" (grieving over and unable to bear the abominable thing committed against her, she killed herself). Even if "unable to bear" suggests criticism as well as pathos (that is, the criticism that she might have been able to bear it had she not been habitually overprotective of reputation), it is difficult to miss the sympathetic tone of the whole — a tone that reinforces one more time the thesis, this essay's second, that our contemporaries have largely misrepresented Augustine's attitude. And, of course, once that thesis is affirmed the hypothesis of deliberate irony in

[37] To borrow Galloway's already-quoted phrase (while reversing his conclusion), Augustine then seems as much a "sympathetic historicist" as are his later commentators. Certainly a capacity for historicism appears strong elsewhere in his work, as when, in commenting on Psalm 64, he remarks: "Every human being, wherever he or she is born, learns the language of that land, or region, or city, and no other; he or she is steeped in those ways of conduct and that life. What should a child born among pagans do, in order not to worship a stone, when the parents have placed that worship deep within [quando illum cultum insinuaverunt parentes]?" (My trans. from Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos 51–100*, CCL 39 [Turnhout, 1956], 64.6, pp. 827–28.) There are instances of historicist thinking in book one of the *City of God* as well, as when Augustine writes of the Romans (thinking again of his admired Regulus) that although the gods they defend are false, "nonetheless they are not false worshipers, but are in fact very faithful swearers of oaths" (1.24). See further Brown, *Augustine* (n. 16 above), 309 n. 6.

Chaucer's line more or less dissolves of its own accord: there is no need to posit irony in an author who is merely reporting what seems to be the case.

The last task before us is a return to the first thesis, the question of Chaucer's direct knowledge of Augustine. The evidence presented to this point should have effectively warded off any objection based on the mistaken but common idea that there cannot have been any such knowledge because Augustine's text cannot be understood as compassionate. But the evidence should also have done far more than that, because the large majority of the arguments for compassion just presented derive from parts of the text that are simply not reproduced in the proposed substitute sources — neither in the *Gesta Romanorum*, nor in Simon de Hesdin's Valerius, nor in the *Polychronicon*.[38] As a result, if we find a later writer calling Augustine compassionate, the safer inference is that the writer probably did read Augustine directly rather than that he did not; there is simply more compassion to be found there than in any of the obvious alternatives. We turn now to a final step that offers evidence of a different kind to strengthen that inference still further in Chaucer's case: the above-mentioned peculiarities of the "Legend of Lucrece" that are easy to explain if Chaucer did have a direct acquaintance with Augustine but difficult to explain if he did not. These appear in two contiguous passages near the poem's end.

4. Chaucer's Familiarity with Augustine: Evidence in the "Legend"

To understand the first of the two passages, it is necessary to broaden the field of investigation in a second way: not only by taking into account the whole of Augustine's discussion, but also by briefly comparing parts of Chaucer's tale to the various renditions of Lucretia's story mentioned above as certain or possible sources — those in Ovid, Livy, the *Gesta Romanorum*, Simon de Hesdin, and Higden's *Polychronicon*. The basic question concerns the moment of the rape itself. In all these versions, as in Chaucer's, Tarquin, generally after having found a series of entreaties, bribes, and threats powerless to convince Lucretia to yield, hits upon the worst threat of all: he will not only ensure her death but defame her memory, by putting a murdered servant in her bed and claiming to have caught them in the act of adultery. At this point in all the possible sources

[38] The major exception is the presence in the *Polychronicon* (and in Trevisa's translation) of Augustine's quotation of the summary line "there were two and one committed adultery." But even in that text we find none of Augustine's other affirmations of Lucretia's chastity, none of his imagination of the inner world of victims, and no statement that we should desire to forgive the suicide. Higden, after all, is about other business — writing the history of the world — and is interested in Lucretia's story primarily because of the ensuing downfall of the Roman monarchy; it is no surprise that he, like so many other readers, passes over the more subtle ethical work that appears outside the nineteenth chapter of Augustine's treatment. See the Rolls Series *Polychronicon* (n. 12 above), 162–63.

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just listed it is clear that Lucretia, overcome by horror at the possibility, gives in. But Chaucer gives her a different reaction:

> … what for fer of sclaunder and drede of deth
> She loste bothe at ones wit and breth,
> And in a swogh she lay, and wex so ded
> Men myghte smyten of hire arm or hed;
> She feleth no thyng, neyther foul ne fayr. (1814–18)

It is not just a brief fainting spell. She is so deeply unconscious that nothing, not even ghastly violence to her body, could wake her. And given its novelty with respect to every work suggested as a source, it seems to be entirely Chaucer's invention.[39] What has prompted such a drastic change?

A number of possible answers have been helpfully laid out in Lisa Kiser's treatment of the story, already mentioned with respect to the question of *compassioun*. In line with a wider set of similarities that Kiser notes between the *Legend of Good*

[39] Ovid, Livy, Simon de Hesdin, and the *Gesta Romanorum* all indisputably have Lucretia conscious during the rape; Higden gives no information one way or the other, but as he mentions no swoon there are no grounds for inferring one. There is, however, one version of the story other than Chaucer's in which Lucretia passes out: that in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (7.4754–5123; the rape itself occupies lines 4959–93). One immediately wants to know whether one English poet's version was a source for the other's. Chronology is of little help, as Gower seems to have started work on the *Confessio* in 1386, the very year in which many scholars believe Chaucer to have written the F-Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, and it is virtually impossible to know whether any particular "legend" was written before or after the Prologue. The fact that Gower not only includes the swoon but entirely omits the unsuccessful threats, bribes, and pleadings that elsewhere precede it might suggest that he is moving further down a trail Chaucer had already blazed, making the rape still more completely a matter of brute force rather than of insidious persuasion, though one cannot be certain. But I have seen no evidence suggesting the reverse possibility that Gower's story was the inspiration for the swoon in Chaucer's; and even if things did proceed that way, it would be fair to ask why Chaucer chose to buck both the source he drew on most (Ovid) and, if he actually used it, the other source he names (Livy) in order to follow Gower in this one particular. One other possibility is that a few lines in Ovid could have suggested the swoon to Chaucer: on Tarquin's announcement of his arrival in the bedroom, Ovid tells us that Lucretia says "nothing, for she has neither voice and the powers to speak nor anything of mind in her entire breast (illa nihil, neque enim vocem viresque loquendi / aut aliquid toto pectore mentis habet)" (2.797–98). But it is amply clear from what follows in Ovid that she has remained conscious, and in any case Chaucer has already translated this momentary incapacity to speak at lines 1796–97. Thus if it suggested the later swoon, it did no more than that, so that here too it is appropriate to seek further reasons for Chaucer's acceptance of the suggestion. For information relevant to the dating of Chaucer's and Gower's versions see, besides the columns already named from the *Riverside Chaucer* (n. 5 above), John H. Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York, 1964), 8–11, 116–120; for Gower's text, see *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell A. Peck (Kalamazoo, MI, 2004), 3.372–80.

Women and late-medieval hagiography, Lucretia's swoon fits the convention in some saints' lives of declaring the saint miraculously spared from the pain of some of the worst tortures (cf. St. Cecilia's imperviousness to the heat of the hypocaust in which the Romans try to roast her — a feature of her story in the *Golden Legend* and elsewhere, preserved in the Second Nun's Tale, line 521). It also could be taken to foreshadow, in a way that would further mimic some hagiography of the time, the approaching real death of the "saint." And it adds another degree to the depravity of the aggressor, in that he is willing to rape a (temporarily) lifeless body.[40] While all these thoughts are reasonable enough, a fourth explanation is possible — one which Kiser also mentions, but only briefly and parenthetically. To my mind, however, if we follow the hypothesis that Chaucer may have been familiar with all the relevant passages of the *City of God* and not just the chapter that explicitly names Lucretia, this fourth explanation easily eclipses all the rest.

It is at root quite simple: it is merely the idea that Chaucer, in the context of writing a *Legend of Good Women*, wanted to create a Lucretia who was as "good" as possible. There is strong independent evidence for that intention. There are, first of all, the similarities to hagiography Kiser highlights for many of the legends, capped in Lucretia's case by the poem's declaration that after the resulting demise of the monarchy she "was holden there [sc. in Rome] / a seynt, and ever hir day yhalwed dere / As in hir lawe" (1870–72).[41] More tellingly, there is the conceit according to which the writing of the *Legend* has been urged upon Chaucer as a kind of penance for previous works that impugned the faithfulness of women — a conceit that makes considerably more specific the kind of "goodness" to be imputed to the lives he will narrate. Queen Alceste gives the poet his orders: Chaucer is to spend his time "In makyng of a glorious legende / Of goode wymmen, maydenes and wyves, / That weren trewe and lovyng al hir lyves; / And telle of false men that hem bytraien …" (F 483–86, G 473–76; the entire surrounding conversation with Alceste and Cupid is worth rereading). In the story of Lucretia, at any rate, the poet has followed his fictional directive

[40] Kiser, *Telling Tales* (n. 6 above), 105–6.

[41] Not to speak of the poem's *explicit*, formed in parallel with those Chaucer gives his other legends of good women: "Explicit Legenda Lucrecie Rome, martiris." The exaltation of Lucretia and the others to a kind of pagan sainthood, however, is not quite the astonishing exercise in poetic *force majeure* that it first seems. In writing his own *Legend* Chaucer surely thought of the most famous such compilation, the calendrically arranged *Legenda aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine, not to mention liturgical lectionaries that similarly provided narratives for a saint celebrated on each day; and in that context it is remarkable that Chaucer's main source for the Lucretia legend in particular, Ovid's *Fasti*, is also a series of stories associated with days of the calendar. Thus the notion that Lucretia had a day "hallowed" to her, and was at least to that extent like a Christian saint, seems to be partly inheritance rather than invention.

closely, so often going out of his way to point out her "trouthe" (e.g., at lines 1843, 1860, and 1874–75) that its establishment as her outstanding characteristic is arguably the poem's most evident goal. And that goal, whether we infer it from the Prologue or the story itself, makes quite clear why Chaucer would wish to expunge from the tale any possibility of an unchaste complicity on Lucretia's part. In fact he appears to have taken other steps in that direction: consider the fact that he has Tarquin arrive by night and steal secretly into Lucretia's house, rather than being received by her, as he is in all the potential sources, as a guest. It is a striking innovation, almost certainly motivated, as Edgar Shannon observed ninety years ago, by Chaucer's desire to make Lucretia's "perfect chastity and innocence appear in greater relief."[42] Her newly invented unconsciousness at the moment of the rape simply moves further in the same direction. Changing the story so that Lucretia no longer welcomes Tarquin for an overnight stay erodes the basis on which an ill-disposed onlooker might generate suspicions of complicity; rendering her unconscious during the attack more or less washes any such basis entirely away.

A second question immediately arises, however. Nearly all the possible sources for Chaucer's story answer the question of Lucretia's possible culpability in the rape with a rather clear negative. They thus let the entire weight of blame fall on Tarquin; and they do so without resort to any such drastic expedient as depriving Lucretia of consciousness. Augustine merely states her chastity as a fact, offering no more argument for it than his agreement with the apparently commonplace refrain about there being only one adulterer in the room. Livy and Ovid treat the case in more detail, but for establishing her innocence it suffices them to have her husband, father, and the other sympathetic men to whom she tells what has happened comfort her with unequivocal declarations that she, as the one on the receiving end of the crime, bears no guilt. Why, in the face of so much authoritative declaration that Lucretia is indeed a "good" (that is, a faithful) woman, did Chaucer feel the need to safeguard her innocence further by a major change in the story?

One answer that looks promising at first, but proves imperfect in the end, is that Chaucer may have felt the need to defend Lucretia also against a second kind of accusation, one that may have become a more pressing concern for him than it was for his sources, even though the groundwork for it exists in Ovid and Livy. That groundwork consists in the already noted fact that in their versions of the story (as in most subsequent ones) Tarquin perpetrates his crime not by brute force but by the threat to which Lucretia yields; to some later authors, despite the contrary declarations of the sympathetic males in the Roman sources, her yielding has seemed a culpable defection from the truer path of virtue, which would have been, they say, allowing herself to be falsely defamed and killed. There is little

[42] Edgar Shannon, *Chaucer and the Roman Poets* (Cambridge, MA, 1929), 224.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2019.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

clear evidence of such an accusation in the works commonly suggested as Chaucer's sources: though the *Gesta Romanorum*, for example, does in various manuscripts declare that Lucretia *concessit* (yielded) or *consensit* (consented) to Tarquin, it juxtaposes that affirmation with the statement that she was *coacta* (compelled), and the combination leaves the reader uncertain about whether some degree of responsibility is being imputed to her.[43] Augustine, for his part, goes to the opposite extreme, rendering any such accusation impossible by a bold move at the beginning of his account: he removes any possibility of a choice between evils on Lucretia's part by eliding all mention of threats, bribes, and promises, and simply stating without ambiguity, in a line already quoted, that the deed was a matter of one-sided violence.[44] Nonetheless the idea of a cowardly Lucretia who should have accepted murder was abroad in at least some circles by Chaucer's time: in particular a number of treatises on canon law suggest that because the compulsion (*coactio*) directed at Lucretia was "conditional" rather than "absolute," some degree of consent and therefore guilt (as regards the rape) should be attributed to her. Some went so far as to declare her guilty of adultery and of mortal sin. If Chaucer had gotten wind of accusations of that sort,

[43] Another possible ancestor that features eyebrow-raising language is Waleys's commentary on the *City of God*, where the word is *assensit* (assented); but the surrounding sentences stress that there is external force involved in the "assent," and moreover seem to be close derivatives of the descriptions in Livy and Ovid, where similar language for the event apparently implies no guilt on Lucretia's part. Waleys's clause, quoted in Galloway ("Chaucer's *Legend*," 819), reads "quo timore victa Lucretia assensit" (conquered by that fear, Lucretia assented); Ovid's, "succubit famae victa puella metu" (conquered by the fear of reputation, the girl succumbed), 2.810; and Livy's, "quo terrore cum vincisset obstinatam pudicitiam" (when [Tarquin's lust] had conquered [her] steadfast sense of shame by that terror), 1.58.5 (though see the notes in the edition of Weissenborn and Müller for a relevant textual crux in Livy; full references for Livy, Ovid, and the following three texts are in n. 5 above). The passage in the *Gesta Romanorum* is "illa vero timens de tali infamia coacta consensit ei" (but, fearing such an infamy, she who had been compelled consented to him — see Dick, *Die Gesta Romanorum*, 70), or simply "coacta concessit" (she who had been compelled yielded — Oesterley, *Gesta Romanorum*, 489). If the phrase in the *Gesta* is intended to imply guilt, it is probably because of the unique function given the story in at least some of its manuscripts: that of a moral allegory in which Lucretia represents the soul "violated" by the devil when it consents to sin, after which it has need of a self-inflicted wound from the "sword" of penitence (see Oesterley, *Gesta Romanorum*, 490, or Stace, trans., 344).

[44] See n. 23 above. It should be remarked that the very brief first-century recounting of Lucretia's story in Valerius Maximus, like that of Augustine, omits Tarquin's threats and bribes and simply declares that the act was unambiguously a violation: in Valerius's words, Lucretia was "compelled by force to suffer defilement (per vim stuprum pati coacta)" (book 6, chap. 1). But I have seen no suggestion that Chaucer followed Valerius directly — though one wonders whether Augustine might have. Simon de Hesdin's translation reproduces Valerius's words faithfully, but they are entirely overshadowed by the preceding "supplement" from Livy, nearly twenty times as long, which includes the threats and the yielding, and consequently leaves open the possibility of the peculiar kind of accusation against Lucretia under discussion here. For Simon, see nn. 5 and 7 above; for Valerius, *Valerius Maximus: Memorable Doings and Sayings*, ed. D. R. Shackleton-Bailey (Cambridge, MA, 2000).

one might imagine, perhaps he could have felt sufficiently alarmed to want to guarantee Lucretia's innocence against them; and having her swoon rather than yield at the crucial moment would meet the need.[45]

It is important to keep these two possible accusations distinct in one's mind, and modern readers have not always done so.[46] The first of them (I will call it Accusation A) is that Lucretia, at least in part or "at some level," secretly

[45] Thus the swoon in Chaucer serves somewhat the same function as does the aforementioned "bold move" with which Augustine begins his telling of the tale — though the swoon also does more, as we will see below. Augustine's alterations may have been prompted by his own remark in chapter 18 that the virtue of *pudicitia* "has as its companion fortitude, by which it determines rather to endure any evil whatsoever than to consent to evil." A direct application of that idea to Lucretia's story as it appears in Livy and Ovid could lead an interpreter to make the accusation just mentioned of "consent to conditional compulsion," although such an accusation would need to take account of the argument that by refusing to consent to being raped Lucretia would effectively be consenting to the murder of an innocent slave, not to mention to her own violent death, whether juridically or at Tarquin's hands (some versions of the story are ambiguous on that last point). It is interesting to speculate whether Augustine may have included the qualification "without a sin of one's own" in his opening remarks (n. 20 above) precisely in order to head off this second kind of accusation against Lucretia, who could only have avoided rape by the sin of approving murder; in that case his later "bold move" amounts to a declaration, regrettably missed by some of his readers, that the sham offer of choice under such duress is a kind of violence no less violent than the physical variety. For details about the canonists' accusations, see Wolfgang P. Müller, "Lucretia and the Medieval Canonists," *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law*, n.s. 19 (1989): 13–32, an article helpfully flagged in Galloway, "Chaucer's *Legend*," 829 n. 6; Müller discusses the high-medieval use of Augustine's remark about fortitude at 23 n. 33.

[46] Müller's article (previous note), notwithstanding its useful provision of a pathway into canon-law materials that many of us would otherwise easily overlook, also serves as a good example of the ease with which the two accusations may be conflated and the damage that results when they are. One result in Müller's case is a serious misrepresentation of the relationship between Augustine and the late-twelfth-century canon lawyer Hugoccio. The latter's strong statement that because Tarquin's coercion was merely "conditional," Lucretia "sinned in that coitus and committed adultery" (quoted in Müller, 22 n. 31) is characterized as strengthening something that Augustine had already "insinuated." But that is not at all the case: in fact Hugoccio is making an accusation of the second type, the type that Augustine's presentation of the story renders impossible from the outset. It should also be said that Müller's article misrepresents Augustine's telling itself, as far as I can tell, in more general ways. One example comes just after it correctly points out (19–21) that Yvo of Chartres and Gratian, the immediate sources for most subsequent medieval writings on canon law, reproduce Augustine's initial laudatory comments on Lucretia but omit his one-guilt-or-the-other dilemma, with the result that these early canonists' selections from his account leave their reader with an impression quite the opposite of that issuing from the very different selections chosen by many modern readers of Augustine (cf. n. 33 above and associated text). However, Müller then concludes that by that piece of editing the canonists "accomplished no less than the complete reversal of Augustine's [actual] standpoint" (20). This seems to me simply incorrect, a misstatement made possible only by Müller's understanding of that standpoint as a "final condemnation of Lucretia's morality" — as if Augustine had been primarily pursuing a summative thumbs-up or thumbs-down judgment on the defendant's worldview,

welcomed Tarquin's attack — that if she was not pursuing active adulterous desires, she at least exerted some volition that would substantiate a verdict of some degree of collusion or consent. The second (Accusation B) has nothing to do with any desire or welcoming on her part; it allows that Tarquin's attack was to her, as her interaction with her relatives the next morning suggests, a horror almost literally unspeakable. But it maintains that faced with a choice of two horrors, rape and murder-with-defamation, Lucretia chose badly in a morally culpable way. The *plausibility* of either accusation is not what is currently at issue: in fact, given the basic events narrated in all versions of the story discussed here, each seems difficult to assert, not to mention simply cruel. What is at issue instead is the degree to which various authors' tellings remove or leave intact the *possibility* of each charge. Livy's version and Ovid's are alike in apparently sparing her the guilt of either accusation by having seemingly authoritative characters declare her innocent; but they are also alike in leaving open the possibility that later readers will think otherwise — not least by putting the declaration of innocence merely in the mouths of characters rather than in the tale-teller's own voice. Augustine's version, as just remarked, forcefully does away with the necessary precondition for Accusation B, namely an account of choice on Lucretia's part; but it does remain open to A as a logical possibility, though one that Augustine himself disavows. Chaucer's drastic innovation entirely excludes both, which is why it would be thinkable to conclude that a newly active concern about type-B accusations had prompted the change.

It would, however, also be somewhat less than convincing. First of all there is the precedent of the ancient authors. Since Livy's story and Ovid's both leave open the possibility of type-B accusations from later readers, but also successfully fend it off for themselves while leaving Lucretia conscious, it is hard to see why Chaucer could not have done the same — first of all simply by repeating what Livy and Ovid say, and then, if the actual presence of such accusations here and there in high-medieval culture had reached Chaucer's ears, perhaps by strengthening it. After all, Chaucer is happy enough elsewhere to make all sorts of choices about the materials he inherits, sometimes selecting one *auctoritee* over another, sometimes bucking several to create his own new version of events, occasionally even breaking into the narration to point out what he is doing. It is not difficult to imagine his asserting himself similarly here in order to forestall any notion of "consent to conditional compulsion."

But there is also a second reason to be skeptical about the swoon as a response to Accusation B, and to believe that Chaucer's main motivation lay elsewhere: there is a competing explanation that would not only make the need for the swoon more compelling, but would render extremely significant some of the language in

rather than the complicated consideration of sin, circumstance, and forgiveness that we have been exploring.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2019.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

which it is expressed — language that otherwise looks unimportant or even puzzling. The competing account is simple: Chaucer would have had special reason to introduce the swoon if he had read and been influenced by the *City of God*.

It is an answer that will gain more strength the more of book one we reread ourselves, because the fear of Accusation A — the fear that rape victims may be suspected of having been seduced by pleasure into secret consent — will reveal itself more and more as a central element of the author's thinking. Whether one finds that the fact speaks well or ill of Augustine's ideas about rape, it is impossible not to be struck by the frequency of his reversion to this concern: besides its most deliberate treatment, already discussed, in chapters 16 and 17, it arises as a logical possibility in chapter 19, in the context of the "dilemma"; then returns in chapters 25 and 27, after a pause while suicide and killing in general are discussed, as soon as sexual violence is taken up again; and it is present explicitly in chapter 28, and implicitly in 18, in the course of further emphasis upon the central proposition that a victim who does not consent is guiltless. Virtually none of this material appears in any other writer, earlier or later.[47] And because Augustine accompanies all this worrying about the accusation with his own affirmations of Lucretia's chastity, the practical impact of his text is a peculiar hybrid: it manages simultaneously to strengthen his reader's impression of Lucretia's innocence and to inculcate into that same reader a nearly unshakeable fear that other hearers of the story might think otherwise. He has, after all, both declared his own belief that her guiltlessness with respect to Accusation A is so certain as to require no belaboring (text to note 23) and declared that he, and everyone else, will be eternally unable to *prove* that guiltlessness, since the logical possibility of hidden consent ("which only she herself could know") acts as an all-but-uncloseable trap door in any attempt at proof (text to note 25).[48] Given that irksome joker in the pack, according to which some undetermined third parties in the indefinite future may always find themselves tempted to think Lucretia guilty, it would not be surprising if a reteller working under Augustine's double

[47] The *Polychronicon* does, it is true, mention the fear of being thought to have secretly assented, because it paraphrases the sentence from chapter 19 in which Lucretia is said to have felt that fear (see n. 14 above). But the mention is brief, in a single phrase, with nothing like the impact of Augustine's repeated reversions to the idea.

[48] Thus while I cannot agree with Isabelle Mast's remark that Augustine "clearly casts doubt on [Lucretia's] innocence" (if it is meant, as its context suggests, to refer to innocence as regards the rape rather than the suicide), the way in which he treats the case does encourage the notion that there will always be doubters among us. Since that dissemination of a kind of second-order doubt will very likely affect how Augustine's readers expect others to hear the tale, it does "cast doubt" in a looser and more associative sense, even though the readers themselves should become more, not less, likely to affirm Lucretia's chastity. See Mast, "Rape in John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and Other Related Works," in *Young Medieval Women*, ed. Katherine J. Lewis et al. (Thrupp, Stroud, UK, 1999), 131 n. 90.

influence were to go looking for ways to settle the question more decisively — particularly if the reteller had reason to want his character to fall beyond all suspicion of unchastity. The swoon that Chaucer invents meets the requirements of such a settlement quite handily, destroying as it does the possibility of either kind of accusation, A or B. In fact some such revision to the story might be the only way of definitively closing the trap door that Augustine's account has left open.[49]

The suspicion that this result is in fact a purpose, that Chaucer has made his change precisely in order to do away with Augustine's tenacious worry, grows still greater when one looks again at the language the poem uses for the swoon. It will help to recall first the strangely lyrical repetitive construction, almost a pun, with which Augustine concisely describes Lucretia's plight: she was led to suicide, he

[49] The question of how Augustine thinks it possible (even if merely logically possible) that there could be consent involved in an act that nonetheless remains violent is potentially a deep one, opening on fundamental beliefs about the nature of human will, its relationship with "external" forces, and the conditions under which we attribute "freedom" and "responsibility" to it. It is presumably this sort of question (rather than the question of a summary thumbs-up or thumbs-down verdict about Lucretia's particular case) that the canonists who invoked Lucretia's story as an aid to thought about "conditional coercion" were trying to explore. In this particular case, however, there may be a relatively simple answer: Augustine may mean that while the rape was an act of unqualified violence to which Lucretia gave no sort of advance consent, it is still logically possible that a rape victim could make an internal act of consent in the course of the attack, because of the pleasure that could be involved. He seems to have that possibility in mind at the beginning of chapter 25, when he imagines other women threatened by rape considering suicide before the fact "lest the body subjected to [another's] desire draw, by a most seductive pleasure, the mind to consent to sin." The possibility would also fit with a three-part structure of sin (or temptation) that appears frequently in Augustine's writings, including works written long before and long after the beginning of the *City of God*: sin, he says in such places, consists of suggestion, enjoyment, and consent, in that order, and the middle phase shares with the first some element of passivity, of coming to the subject involuntarily and from outside. (Cf. Greenstadt, "Rapt from Himself" [n. 33 above], 314–19, for similar distinctions in late-medieval and early modern law, though caution is needed with respect to her account of the complex relations between these later writers and Augustine's own text. For Augustine himself, see especially his *De sermone Domini in monte* 1.12.33–36, but also *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 2.14.20–21; the entirety of *Sermo* 98; and the brief mention at *Confessions* 10.30.41.) Such ideas would provide a clear interpretation of the otherwise difficult passage quoted at n. 25 above.

Besides the observations that it overcomes "consent-to-conditional-compulsion" (or type-B) accusations and that it overcomes Augustine's worry about "hidden consent" (type A), there is yet a third effort to explain Lucretia's swoon in Warburton, "Reading Rape" (n. 34 above), 284 n. 12. The treatment there, however, might mislead readers about some of the details of Augustine's stance: whatever later medieval ideas about rape may have been, Augustine himself seems clear that pleasure, if it should occur in such a context, need not imply guilt (or, in the later terms that Warburton tracks, the loss of one's status as a "good woman"). The judgment is clear from the threefold structure of sin just described; it is also reflected in the simple fact that the *City of God* never says that pleasure implies consent. Instead it says, as we have seen, only that some may suspect that it has led there in a particular case.

writes, out of fear "that it would be supposed, if she lived [*si viveret*], that she underwent freely that which she underwent violently while she lived [*cum viveret*]."[50] Whatever Augustine intends by that rhetoric, one of its effects is to emphasize that the fact that Lucretia is alive during the rape is a presupposition necessary for the worry that she secretly assented. Might not a poet prompted by that observation remove the worry by temporarily depriving her of life-force? Is it not remarkable, in that context, that Chaucer describes the *swough* as one in which Lucretia *wex* as if *ded* (1816)? And if we also bear in mind the basic mechanism behind Augustine's worry, expressed three chapters earlier and so constantly returned to, the final line of the swoon's description becomes still more remarkable. In itself — which is to say, if Augustine's concerns are not in the picture — it appears to add nothing, even to be merely a kind of poetic filler. But in the context of a persistent fear that rape victims will be thought complicit because of physical pleasure that might attend the act, the poet suddenly has a very precise reason for telling his readers that Lucretia "feleth no thyng, *neyther foul ne fayr*" (1818). The line not only allays Augustine's besetting concern about Lucretia but even recalls the structure of his introductory thoughts on rape in general: in the terms quoted above from chapter 16, Chaucer is telling us that the unconscious Lucretia escapes both sorts of passivity that may attend a sexual assault, both the experience of "quod ad dolorem pertinet" (that which pertains to pain) and that of "quod ad libidinem pertinet" (that which pertains to sensual desire). No other proposed source mentions such a distinction at all. Moreover, only two others, namely Ridevall's commentary and the *Polychronicon*, reproduce any trace of Augustine's repetition of *viveret*, and they include only the remark about Lucretia's survival after the rape, not the one about her being alive during it (cf. note 14). Thus it is only the hypothesis of Chaucer's direct familiarity with Augustine that could invest these two lines from the poem with such robust significance. If instead Chaucer was seeking *merely* to head off the accusation that Lucretia culpably "yielded" to Tarquin out of fear of his threat, the special significance vanishes: the poem's remarks about her inability to feel pleasure and her deathlike state, responsive as they are to Augustine's concerns and diction, add to the defense against that type-B accusation nothing beyond what simple unconsciousness has already provided.

That concludes the consideration of Lucretia's swoon — one of the promised two passages providing internal evidence for Chaucer's direct reading of Augustine. The other, which can be handled much more quickly, is the single couplet immediately preceding the swoon. It too is an innovation on Chaucer's part: the two taken together, and completed by a short trailing apostrophe that condemns the "vileyns dede," make up a single thirteen-line interruption in a flow of events

[50] This is, of course, one sentence of the key passage from chapter 1.19 translated near the beginning of this essay, with its phrases slightly rearranged to clarify the point at hand.

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that otherwise adheres closely to Ovid. The addition begins immediately after Tarquin issues his threat to frame Lucretia as an adulteress, which will mean, he concludes by telling her, that "thow shalt be ded and also lese / Thy name" (1810–11). Chaucer not only declares that the swoon comes about in response to that threat, but also specifies why: because "These Romeyns wyves lovede so here name / At thilke tyme, and dredde so the shame" (1812–13) that the combined threat of *sclaunder* and *deth* knocks this particular Roman wife out cold. The lines contain a subtle, but striking, parallel with the *City of God*. While nearly all the versions of the story here considered make it clear that Lucretia fears shame, it is Augustine alone who delivers any such comment about Roman wives as a class: his remark, again contained in this essay's first long quotation, associating Lucretia's shame with her status as a "Roman wife [*mulier*], excessively eager for praise" (1.19). Livy and Ovid make no such comment, and the later retellers writing in Augustine's wake generally omit it — with the exception, of course, of Chaucer himself. The only other widely known writer who comes close to preserving it is Higden, but he changes it to "gens Romana maxime erat avida laudis" (the Roman *people* was eager for praise) — thus providing yet another reason to think that however much Chaucer may have learned about Augustine from the *Polychronicon*, he all but certainly learned about Augustine from Augustine as well.[51]

5. Chaucer and the *City of God*: The Evidence in Review

We have seen, by my count, six pieces (or in some cases "groups") of evidence suggesting Chaucer's direct knowledge of Augustine's treatise; three derive from the treatise and three from Chaucer's poem. The first is that the instances in which certain later writers repackaged the contents of the *City of God* in a way allegedly more compassionate toward Lucretia turn out on closer inspection to be illusory, as such compassion as they possess derives quite directly from Augustine himself. The second is that the treatise shows several kinds of compassion that are routinely overlooked, including an effort to imagine the mental world of rape

[51] I insert the qualification *widely known* because I have not managed to see either of the two extant manuscripts of Ridevall's commentary, and the selections in Galloway's "Chaucer's *Legend*" do not include the relevant passage. Trevisa's translation of the *Polychronicon*, for its part, is faithful to Higden's altered version, declaring only that "þe Romayns" desired human praise (Rolls series, 163). It should be noted that Chaucer's couplet (1812–13) likely contains a *double* echo of Augustine, as the *dredde* of *schame* adduced in its second line could easily descend from phrases that occur within about a dozen words of Augustine's reference to the "Romana mulier": "pudoris infirmitas" (the inconstancy of shame), "puduit" (she was ashamed), and "verita est ne putaretur" (she feared that it would be supposed). But since the paraphrase of Augustine's text that appears, through Ridevall, in Higden and Trevisa (n. 14, and text to n. 12, above) contains near-equivalents of the first and third phrases, this second echo cannot be claimed as independent evidence for Chaucer's direct knowledge of Augustine.

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victims and an explicit statement that suicide in such a case, though wrong, should prompt a desire to forgive rather than to condemn — and also including some affirmations of Lucretia's chastity so strong as to make clear that the text's apparently cruel moral dilemma is a matter of covering logically possible bases rather than of anything that Augustine seriously entertains. Third is the observation that the passages containing those outstanding expressions of compassion are omitted, almost without exception, by the later authors commonly proposed as intermediates between Augustine and Chaucer.

The fourth piece of evidence is that one of Chaucer's most dramatic innovations in the story — the fact that Lucretia passes out rather than "yielding" in response to Tarquin's last threat — would be well explained as the reaction of an author primed to fear that some might suspect her of a kind of guilt that would be hard to disprove in any other way; and it is the *City of God*, rather than any other relevant source, that thus primes its readers. Fifth, Chaucer's language for the swoon encourages the inference that the innovation was meant to abrogate Augustine's concern: the poem's observations that Lucretia *wex* as if *ded* and felt nothing *fayre* both negate conditions (respectively life and pleasure) that Augustine notes as requirements for the third-party accusation of secret assent that so worries him. And finally, Chaucer's nearby assertion that Roman wives as a class dreaded shame seems to appear in no relevant source but the *City of God* itself.

The case is strong: even if it stops short of demonstrative proof, it seems to me easily sufficient to make the odds that Chaucer knew the treatise at first hand — or at least knew the substantial section of its first book that concerns itself with sexual dishonor and suicide — far stronger than the odds that he did not. And that conclusion, once established as the more probable of the two, should affect further thinking about Chaucer and his work in at least two ways. First of all, it suggests that Chaucer not only knew Augustine's treatise but understood it well enough to shape one of his poems partly in a targeted response to the detailed thinking about human psychology he found there — thus engaging with Augustine in a quite complex, human-centered, and, as it were, colorful way. It is particularly gratifying to see that thoughtful craft at work in the *Legend of Good Women*, an unfinished collection whose handling of its heroines has sometimes been experienced as so painfully monochrome as to suggest that Chaucer (or the work's fictional "narrator") must have abandoned it out of sheer boredom.[52]

[52] The question of what Chaucer's attention to the *City of God* in writing his story of Lucrece might mean for the *Legend* as a whole is, of course, outside this paper's scope. For the suggestion of narratorial boredom, see Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, WI, 1989), 84–87. It is worth acknowledging that Chaucer's invention of Lucretia's swoon, for all that it suggests a thoughtful and creative engagement with Augustine's text, does push Lucretia in the passive direction that Dinshaw finds regrettably emphasized for all the "saints" in the *Legend*, even though she seems to me to overplay the sameness of those tales and of saints' lives generally.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2019.6 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The second set of consequences is, in a way, simpler. It comes merely from noting that if Chaucer knew well and took seriously a substantial section of the first book of the *City of God*, the effects of that knowledge will likely appear in other poems than this one, and our readings will be stronger if they take account of the likelihood. Some complication enters with the question of how much more of the treatise Chaucer may have read. It seems probable that if he knew these middle chapters, he also knew the rest of book one: as noted above, medieval manuscripts separated the individual chapters much less than modern typography does, and I have seen no evidence that the thirteen chapters on rape and suicide were ever extracted as a unit. It is also reasonable to consider, though with a proportionately increased admixture of caution, whether Chaucer may have been familiar with the entire treatise. That interesting possibility will gain in likelihood if one recalls that the *City of God* was enjoying a kind of renaissance of interest in the fourteenth century, that the renaissance flourished among humanist authors (like Trevet and Francis Petrarch) well known to Chaucer, and that it involved a special fervor for working from the original text rather than from excerpts and summaries.[53] But regardless of which of these levels of knowledge of the text one finds plausible, there will be consequences for Chaucer's poetry. Even the few sections investigated here with respect to the "Legend of Lucrece" harbor questions of evident concern to other poems — most clearly, perhaps, to the end of the Franklin's Tale, whose interpretation will depend very much on what ideas about the morality of suicide under duress (and under sexual threat in particular) we imagine to be presupposed, or aired for debate, there. If we then broaden the scope of Chaucer's likely knowledge by just a few pages, it will take in Augustine's treatment of the question of death without burial, considered among the ravages of war in chapters 12 and 13: and that question not only appears, but appears with a repetitive insistence Chaucer

[53] We have already seen that Trevet, author of the *Anglo-Norman Chronicle* that underlies the Man of Law's Tale, began a flurry of fourteenth-century commentaries on the *City of God*. Petrarch of course also counts as one of Chaucer's major literary ancestors, having written one of the Clerk's Tale's two most important sources; he includes *De civitate Dei* on a short list of his favorite books, where it is the only one by a Christian author. Such connections do not guarantee that Chaucer knew of his sources' interest, but they do indicate that *De civitate* was widely and enthusiastically circulated in intellectual circles that he frequented. For more on the fourteenth century's enthusiasm for the book, see Bonnie Kent, "Reinventing Augustine's Ethics: The Afterlife of the *City of God*," in *Augustine's City of God: A Critical Guide*, ed. James Wetzel (Cambridge, UK, 2012), 225–44, at 242–44. For the idea of a late-medieval renaissance of interest in Augustine more generally, a *locus classicus* is Heiko Oberman, "Headwaters of the Reformation: Initia Lutheri — Initia Reformationis," in *Luther and the Dawn of the Modern Era: Papers for the Fourth International Congress for Luther Research*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 8 (Leiden, 1974), 40–88; and see further the criticism of Oberman's theological argument in Erik Saak's *Creating Augustine: Interpreting Augustine and Augustinianism in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2012), chap. 1.

adds to his sources, in the mouth of the Clerk's Tale's Griselda. Augustine, of course, argues strongly (as many pagan philosophers also did) that lack of burial is not to be feared. How, then, might our understanding of Chaucer's character change if, as now appears likely, her creator has simultaneously emphasized her Christianity, relative to his sources, and knowingly made her fret at great length over a question that a leading Christian authority of the age has forcefully declared to be of no ultimate importance? Finally, if Chaucer knew the remainder of the *City of God*, the number of possible connections with his work grows large indeed: the extensive considerations of Stoic philosophy in books nine and fourteen, for example, may well be able to cast light on the several works (most patently the Clerk's, Man of Law's, and Knight's Tales and the Melibee) in which Chaucer meditates at length on the questions about human suffering and the relationship between passivity and activity that are so central to the ethics of that school.

There are, in a word, many possibilities for further work. There is also, of course, the need for caution: surely any critic will have to acknowledge the ease and frequency with which apparent evidence can offer itself in support of patterns and connections that he or she has in mind, but that later prove illusory. But a need for care is not the same as a signal to abandon the enterprise — nor even as a signal to abandon working from patterns and connections, if only they can be treated as hypotheses to be tested rather than as foregone conclusions to be shored up at any cost. Here I have attempted to establish such a hypothesis about one poem of Chaucer's, and I hope that the relatively restricted scope of the claim has helped make the argument convincing. If the claim holds, my next hope will be that others, fuelled by a similar blend of eagerness and care, will find here tools and materials useful in putting together their own, perhaps more expansive, efforts at understanding.[54]

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Keywords: rape, consent, compassion, *City of God* (book), *Legend of Good Women* (poem), chastity, shame

[54] Initial approaches to several of the questions mentioned in the last two paragraphs appear, with more background details provided, in my *God's Patients* (n. 24 above). For the morality of suicide in the Franklin's Tale, see 226–28; for Griselda on death without burial, 342 n. 50; for the new weight Chaucer puts on Griselda's Christianity, 68–72 and 334 n. 30; and for a fuller methodological discussion about interpretation, hypothesis, and historicism, see chap. 2 and the index, s.v. "hypothetico-deductive argument." David Aers took up the third of these points some time ago but drew quite different conclusions from it; see the first chapter of his *Faith, Ethics, and Church: Writing in England, 1360–1409* (Cambridge, UK, 2000).