

## Teaching Lucretia: Addressing Sexual Violence As A Responsible Pedagogy

Lucretia: Livy, *Ab Urbe Condita* 1.57-59

Wheelock F. M. and R. A. LaFleur. 2011. *Wheelock's Latin 7th Edition*. New York: Harper Collins.

### Chapter 7:

#### “The Rape of Lucretia”

Tarquinius Superbus erat rēx Rōmānōrum, et Sextus Tarquinius erat fīlius malus tyrannī. Sextus Lucrētiam, uxōrem Collātīnī, rapuit, et fēmina bona, propter magnum amōrem virtūtis, sē necāvit. Rōmānī antīquī virtūtem animōsque Lucrētiaē semper laudābant et Tarquiniōs culpābant.



The Rape of Lucretia. Felice Ficherelli, 1605–1660. Oil on tinned copper.  
*The Wallace Collection, London, Great Britain*

last king and an Etruscan, Collatinus a Roman nobleman; according to legend, the rape of Lucretia was a precipitating factor that led to the overthrow of the Tarquin dynasty, the end of Etruscan rule and of the monarchy itself, and the establishment of the Roman Republic in 509 B.C.—**rapuit:** *raped*; “rapacious,” “rapture.”—**sē:** *herself*.—**necāvit:** a past tense form.—**Tarquiniōs:** i.e., the entire royal family.

**QVAESTIŌNĒS:** Livy’s moralizing tone was evident in the passage adapted from his preface, which you read in the last chapter, and throughout his work it seems he was as interested in drawing moral lessons as he was in reporting facts. Based on this brief, adapted passage, what were some of the virtues Romans most admired? What is your personal view of Lucretia’s suicide, and of the Roman response to it, as suggested in this passage? Compare Ficherelli’s painting above with the manuscript illustration on p. 53.

### Sample Pedagogy Goals for Teaching Lucretia

- Gender and cultural values
- The symbolic role of women, the “body politic”
- Individual vs structural agency
- Collateral damage in politics
- Importance of ancestry and heritage

### Sample Contextualization

- Narrative process
- Power dynamics: expectations, reality, gender differences
- Agency: narrative, personal, structural
- Emphasis on *representation*: Lucretia as a character

### Sample discussion questions for Lucretia

- How does Livy describe Lucretia in the passage? Are these adjectives positive or negative? Are they gendered?
  - Who has control at different points in the story? How does this change, and why is that significant? What kinds of control (personal, political) are on display?
  - What kind of agency does Lucretia have throughout the story? Why do you think Livy offers this character to his readers?
  - Lucretia is a symbolic figure. What does she symbolize? How do you know?
  - Is Lucretia a political figure? Why or why not? Does she make herself political or not, or does someone else?
  - What is the significance of this story as the origin story of the Roman Republic—why does a woman’s rape result in drastic political change? What does this tell you about Roman culture?
  - What do you think Livy wants his audience, after Caesar’s assassination, to take away from this story?
  - Why does Livy give Lucretia direct speech? Why does she demand vengeance from a crowd of men? Why is she characterized as bold, determined, and steadfast?
  - Why do you think this was a popular story to depict in art?
- Without context: “Why do you think Lucretia killed herself?”
- With Context: “Why does Livy show Lucretia’s suicide, and how does he characterize her decision?”

Bruney, Gabrielle. 2019: “But the nudity on *Game of Thrones* was regressive, never equitable and often contrived, and consisted largely of beautiful women dropping trou to titillate the audience, again and again. ...*Thrones*’s misogyny demonstrates a profound lack of imagination. Martin, Benioff, and Weiss could conjure dragons, but not a world in which men could be the targets of female desire. They brought White Walkers to terrifying life, but couldn’t consider sexual assault as anything more than a provocative plot point. This failure has thrown a pall over seven seasons of otherwise great television, and it’s a sin that threatens to limit the show’s watchability in future years, as audiences tolerate less and less chauvinism in their entertainment. No matter what happens in the final season, *Thrones*’ treatment of women has irreparably tainted the series.”

### **Guiding questions to prepare a lecture on Difficult Material**

1. What is the text, and what is the subtext? Do they send the same message?
  - a. What is the difference? Is that difference due to your modern classroom / audience? The overall course goals?
2. Why do you want to teach this topic?
  - a. Bad Answers: “it’s in my textbook” or “I learned it this way.”
  - b. Good Answers: “it explains X important aspect of Roman culture” or “it enables a conversation about Y key theme of the course”
3. What are the big themes of the topic, and where else do they appear in your syllabus?
  - a. If they don’t appear anywhere else, make sure you have a good answer for question 1. In a language class, think about providing context for the abstract grammar/translation method
  - b. If the themes come up elsewhere, think about how large-scale structure and call-backs
4. What are the 2-3 major things you want your students to focus on in class / during the activity?
5. What are the 2-3 major facts you want your students to leave class knowing?
6. How will you make space later in the semester if your student returns to this lesson?

### **Sample lesson structures**

- In-class discussion tied to textbook material
- In-class discussion tied to non-textbook material circulated in advance
- Blog post (students write 250-300 word responses to broad or specific prompt, and comment on set number of peer responses)
- Short-answer reports (students write responses to selection of specific prompts and submit for grade)

### **Bibliographies and Resources:**

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