

Few incidents in antiquity have been more widely celebrated than the rape of Lucretia. Doubly victim of an individual act of male violence and of a male-oriented culture, Lucretia may be an appropriate representative of the outlook on such a crucial issue as rape in both ancient and modern times. The circumstances of her rape and subsequent suicide have given, and still give, occasion to debate legal, social, and ethical issues related to the phenomenon in modern as well as ancient times. I will report on the results of a project designed, first, to engage students in the discussion of the rape as portrayed in ancient and modern sources, and second, to create a performance (consisting of an exposition and rhetorical debates on the case, in line with the ancient *controversia*), taking the results of class discussion to a wider audience. In the classroom, ancient texts, such as Livy (*Ab urbe condita*, 1. 57-60), Ovid (*Fasti* II, 685-852 ) and Augustine (*The City of God* 16-20), have constituted primary tools of investigation. They have been followed and completed through (1) readings of Giovanni Boccaccio (*De mulieribus claris* 48), Geoffrey Chaucer (*The Legend of Good Women: Lucretia*) and William Shakespeare (*The Rape of Lucrece*); (2) analysis of artistic expressions (such as the paintings of Botticelli and Titian, the sculpture of Reuben Nakian, and the opera by Benjamin Britten).

To engage students in the debate, I have singled out the most compelling questions that the case of Lucretia almost inevitably prompts us to ask ourselves: Did Lucretia have a choice? Could she rebel? Why did she commit suicide, considering that - as she herself said - “it is only the body that has been violated, the soul is pure; death shall bear witness to that” (Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, 1. 59)?

The debate has inevitably been extended to the legal and ethical components of such a case. As to the legal component, we have investigated the laws on marriage, rape and adultery of the Augustan period (ex.: *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis*), the time in which the historian Livy wrote his History of Rome. For this debate, I also exposed students to the linguistic analysis of terms whose meanings were not as distinguished as they are nowadays, such as *adulterium* (Gr. : *moicheia*) and *stuprum* (Gr.: *phthora*). As to the ethical components, a comparative investigation of the ethics of the Augustan period and those of the late imperial period, when new religious issues arose with the spread of Christianity, has enabled students to more fully understand the case as it has been treated by the Christian writer Augustine. Moreover, the issue of honor has provided a chance to debate on what is, still nowadays, a stigma or taboo for women who are victims of sexual violence.