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Livy's Early Women: Victims and Actors
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Introduction: What is Power and Who Qualifies As a Victim?

Women in ancient Rome do not often come to mind when historians discuss the great contributors to history. Instead, great generals and corrupt emperors fill the pages of many history books. Unfortunately, Roman women do not usually play major roles in the histories of some ancient historians like Tacitus unless their actions are reprehensible and scandalous. Both debauched women and honorable women, however, play significant roles in one particular Roman history. Titus Livius, otherwise known as Livy and considered one of Rome's greatest historians, includes the contributions of both women and men in the ancient Roman history, *Ab Vrbe Condita*, "From the Founding of the City," which describes Roman history from its humble beginnings to Livy's own time during the reign of Augustus Caesar. Even though this once was a great opus, we do not have the entire history today. We do, however, have the first ten books and books twenty-one to forty-five. Although the first five books of his history are a recounting of the myths, legends, and oral history of Rome's foundation, the way in which Livy features his female characters has great significance for the study of Roman history by giving insights into Livy's contemporary audience.

In order to understand better the way in which Livy writes, readers must examine the important, although few, details available about his personal life. Livy was born c. 59 BC, the year of Julius Caesar's first consulship, in Patavium (modern day Padua) and died there c. AD 17, three years after the death of Augustus Caesar.¹ Livy grew up in a time of great civil unrest and saw domestic peace restored under the *Pax Romana*, "the Roman Peace," by Julius Caesar's heir Octavian, who later became Augustus Caesar, the first emperor of Rome, after the defeat of Cleopatra and Marc Antony at the battle of Actium in 31 BC. Although Livy came of age in a tumultuous time, his hometown of Patavium remained distinguished for morality and economic success.² Since not much evidence exists about Livy's familial background, there is an

¹Ogilvie, 1. These dates are open to dispute. Ogilvie also gives 64 BC for Livy's birth and AD 12 for Livy's death as possibilities.

²Ogilvie, 2.

assumption that he did not come from the senatorial class.³ After receiving some form of education, Livy may have come to Rome sometime before 27 BC. He completed the first five books of *Ab Vrbe Condita* between 27 BC, the year in which Octavian was declared “Augustus,” and 25 BC, according to internal evidence. There is nothing to indicate that he began writing his history before 29 BC, but Livy may have done so. He held no political positions during his lifetime and devoted his life to writing, mostly concentrating on *Ab Vrbe Condita*. He did have some form of acquaintance with Augustus and even encouraged the young Claudius, who would one day become emperor himself, to write history. By these associations, Livy closely witnessed the moral reforms enacted by Augustus.⁴

During the time at which Augustus was enacting legislation concerning morality, Livy, in his own way, aided the emperor by writing *Ab Vrbe Condita*. Even though his history parallels the morality of Augustus’ legislation, Livy never closely associated himself with that legislation.⁵ Regardless, Livy wished to present the Roman populace with moral paradigms, *exempla*, or examples, from the past. He states his intentions in the preface:

Hoc illud est praecipue in cognitione rerum salubre ac frugiferum, omnis te exempli documenta in inlustri posita monumento intueri; inde tibi tuaeque rei publicae quod imitere capias, inde foedum inceptu foedum exitu quod uites (Livy Praefatio 10-11).

What is particularly fertile and healthy in a study of history is this, that you may look upon the documents of every example in an illustrious monument; from which may you seize what to imitate for yourself and for your republic, from these what to shun, foul in its beginning, foul in its end.⁶

In the preface, Livy, who presents a strict sense of morality and support of the traditional views of the Roman populace, hopes that, by writing his history, his audience would study the actions of their ancestors and strive to live by good example. In the first five books of his history, Livy presents traditional Roman stories which the majority of his audience probably already knew since these legends and myths were part of a large Roman oral history. Livy adds his own touch,

³Ogilvie, 1.

⁴Ogilvie, 3.

⁵Ogilvie, 4.

⁶All Latin translations are mine.

however, by presenting his characters in such a way that they could serve as moral guides for his contemporary audience.

In Livy's presentation of moral guides, not only are men featured as *exempla* but so are women. One of the characterizations Livy employs is that of the rape victim. Rape and other violations of women seem to precede all major political developments in Rome's formation in the first three books of the history. The first of these developments occurs with the rape of Rhea Silvia by the god Mars. Although apparently prevented from bearing children by being named as a Vestal Virgin by her tyrannical uncle Amulius, Rhea Silvia conceives Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, as a result of a violation. The next development occurs when Romulus and his men abduct the Sabine women in order to procure wives. The Sabine women, however, with the aid of Hersilia, the wife of Romulus, are instrumental in ensuring the survival of Rome by becoming wives and persuading their parents and husbands to make peace. In another story, Lucretia is raped by Sextus Tarquinius, the king's son. Her suicide catalyzes the formation of the Roman Republic and the overthrow of the corrupt monarchy. In addition to Rhea Silvia, the Sabine women, and Lucretia, Verginia figures as a victim when her father kills her to prevent her being raped by a decemvir. This act hastens the process to overthrow the corrupt second decemvirate and give the plebeians back their tribunes and the right of appeal.

Scholars and readers of Livy, for the most part, see Rhea Silvia, the Sabine women, Lucretia, and/or Verginia as victims of rape.⁷ Despite this view, Livy characterizes them as effecting positive political change, therefore serving as catalysts, by their words and actions. According to Sandra R. Joshel in "The Body Female and the Body Politic: Livy's Lucretia and Verginia," women's moral actions, as depicted in Livy, are the sole catalyst for the political actions of men. Moreover, she argues that Rhea Silvia, Lucretia, and Verginia, victims of rape or, at least, threatened by it, in the case of Verginia, serve as a space, or boundary, between men in the body politic in Livy's Rome. When they are violated, they become catalysts for male

⁷Arieti, Beard (1999), Claussen, Donaldson, Holleman, Joplin, Joshel, Ogilvie, Small, Wiseman.

action, in particular, war. In addition to violated women, other women like Lavinia, who was Aeneas' wife, quickly enter and leave Livy's narrative. When women disappear from Livy's narrative, she argues that men who have violated the women or who have replaced them have conquered this space. These women are, for the most part, essential, however, in spurring the men to action, both politically and morally.⁸

The issue of space is also important to Patricia Klindienst Joplin, who argues in "Ritual Work on Human Flesh: Livy's Lucretia and the Rape of the Body Politic" that rape stems from a "*mimetic* desire."⁹ Wreaking havoc on women, political turmoil creates situations in which men rape their enemies' women. Like Joshel, Joplin argues that a Roman woman in Livy occupies a space, and, if this space is important to the men waging war, she becomes a victim of rape. Joplin believes that women wield a great deal of political power if they realize their position.¹⁰

Joshel and Joplin represent only one voice in scholarship that has focused on the rapes of these women.¹¹ In contrast, Elizabeth Vandiver in "The Founding Mothers of Livy's Rome: The Sabine Women and Lucretia" analyzes the actions that the victims take. By doing so, she analyzes Livy's complexities¹² more deeply. She argues that the Sabine women and Lucretia, who are victims, act independently from the men. Their autonomy is important for the foundation of Rome because both men and women's moral actions determine the welfare and stability of the state. Moreover, by examining the Latin used by Livy, Vandiver argues that the

⁸ Joshel, 121.

⁹ Joplin, 52.

¹⁰ Joplin, 64.

¹¹ See note 7.

¹² According to Ogilvie, the writing of history ancient to one's own time period is difficult, "The history of remote ages presents two principal difficulties. Even if the material at the historian's disposal is not scanty and untrustworthy, it is hard to make it of interest or relevance to modern readers. . . . The second difficulty Livy tackled not by modifying or revising the data as he found them in his sources in order to produce a coherent account of early times, but by casting them into a particular mould as illustration of moral truths" (17, 18). Given the great amount of information, Livy had a hard task; therefore, he created a complex work in order to consolidate tradition and his moral agenda.

Romans do not rape the Sabine women but abduct them, contrary to previously held beliefs.¹³

Even though Vandiver stands alone at this point, her work goes in the right direction, for Joshel's and Joplin's views are too limited. Following the work of Vandiver, I wish to go a step further and examine in Livy's early history the accounts of the women whom so many scholars see only as victims of rape because not only do women in Livy exercise political power by occupying powerful positions but they also act independently.¹⁴ What makes them victims and how do they overcome their victimization? Although males dominate them, they inadvertently act as catalysts for political change. In addition, they make important, independent decisions which aid in Rome's foundation. Do all of them act independently? No, they contrast with Verginia, the model victim. Is rape always the nature of their suppression? Some of these women are not even victims of rape at all. For the most part, however, these women do aid in the development of Rome even though they are victims.¹⁵

Livy's Roman women develop specific strategies by which to exercise power. One of the most important strategies is speech, which the women, in many cases, use in order to work through men. Andrew Laird in *Powers of Expression, Expression of Power: Speech Presentation and Latin Literature* argues that people throughout history, including classical times, have equated speech with power.¹⁶ Laird, who sees speech as a defining characteristic of important people in an account such as Livy's, states that

Just as discourse constitutes social hierarchy and human identity, so speech makes up the organization of a narrative and shapes the identity of characters.¹⁷

By speaking, a character elevates his position to a higher and more powerful one than the position of a character who does not speak. Through the power of speech, women effect change

¹³Vandiver, 209. She is the only scholar to date to make this argument.

¹⁴See note 7.

¹⁵The scope of my thesis will cover the first three books of Livy's history in which these women appear. Even though the fourth and fifth books of Livy's history are part of the foundation history, rape is not an issue in them; therefore, they will not be included here.

¹⁶Laird, 8.

¹⁷Laird, 5.

through the men in their lives in Livy. Livy depicts his women frequently using speech in order to persuade these men either to act for the benefit of Rome or to act for their own personal gain.

Even victimized women in Livy use speech frequently. But, what defines a victim? A victim is a person who is acted upon often in a violent manner. Some victims can transcend their victimization while others cannot. In Livy, speech is one of the main ways in which a victim can master his or her restraint or violation. Epitomes of victimization cannot overcome their troubled situations because they do not speak. An epitome of a victim effects absolutely no change upon his or her situation because he does not act or demonstrate any wish to act. Speech is essential for a victim to overcome his or her suppression. Since speech is power, a character who lacks speech does not wield power and does not effect any change. An epitome of a victim is not a characterization often employed by Livy. Instead, many different forms of victimization, including rape, abduction, and prohibition of issue, are presented, and the victims, for the most part, overcome their situations to effect change. A victim can, however, overcome her terrorization and become an actor in her own right.

In order to analyze the power which the victimized women as actors in their own right wield, readers must understand the general notions of power. Definitions of power generally can be sorted into two different categories. As proposed by Daniel Miller and Christopher Tilley, in *Ideology, Power and Prehistory*, one meaning is “power to,” in which power is “an integral and recursive element in all aspects of social life.” Conversely, “power over,” refers to power “specifically related to forms of social control.”¹⁸ “Power to” is the ability that someone has to influence the world around him. “Power over” refers to control of one person over another. Even though quite different, both meanings “indicate an irreducible link between power as a capacity to modify or transform.”¹⁹ Power can only be exercised, not possessed, by an individual or group and can be measured by its effects.²⁰ Individuals or groups can possess powerful

¹⁸Miller and Tilley, 3.

¹⁹Miller and Tilley, 5.

²⁰Miller and Tilley, 8.

positions, but they can never possess power only wield it.

Women in the ancient world are usually portrayed as wielding power within a community but are seen as problematic when they do dominate. Even though most feminist theorists²¹ have not examined women in the ancient world wielding power, they have embraced the particular ideas that power strengthens a community and that power should not solely be linked to dominance. Nancy C. M. Hartsock discerns the ways in which feminist theories differ from the dominance theories of power in *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* and offers a clearer picture as to what is meant by feminist theories on power. In order to show that power has different connotations, one of the theorists whom Hartsock analyzes is Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), one of the leading political philosophers of the twentieth century. Arendt's survival of a Nazi concentration camp led her to see power in forms of control other than domination. In particular, she believed that the strength of a community was due to the political actions of all of its citizens so as to avoid totalitarianism. Hartsock includes this theory of Arendt because it upholds Hartsock's argument that "power structures community."²² What makes Hartsock's analysis crucial is that Arendt based her theory on the ancient *polis*, or "city-state."²³ Hartsock states that

In order to [examine power], Arendt proposes to draw on the Athenian and Roman tradition, a political tradition that, as she has interpreted it, did not identify power as command.²⁴

Contrary to Arendt's views, the Romans did see power as command (Miller and Tilley's meaning of "power over") in many instances. However, by examining the way in which Livy portrays women, readers can see the validity of her argument which parallels Miller and Tilley's meaning of "power to." Although she does not discuss the portrayal of women in ancient

²¹Feminist theorists of power see power as linked to competence instead of dominance because individuals do not have to dominate others in order to wield power. See Carroll. Theorists who are not necessarily feminist but who embrace some feminist viewpoints include Hannah Arendt, Dorothy Emmet, and Hanna Pitkin, who share the view that power is linked to competence instead of dominance.

²²Hartsock, 11.

²³Hartsock, 218.

²⁴Hartsock, 218.

literature, Hartsock elaborates on Arendt's view which sees power wielded within a community:

Power is at once (1) the 'glue' that holds the community together, (2) the means by which community is constituted.²⁵

In another sense, power contributes to the foundation and growth of a society through the competent choices made by the community's citizens. Instead of domination, power, a "creative energy," is a unifying force for a community and relies on the competence of the individual to wield it.²⁶

In Livy's *Ab Vrbe Condita*, the Roman citizens, including and especially women, exercise a degree of power in the city's formation. For the purpose of this thesis, "power to" will be used to describe the power exercised by the women in Livy's history. The competent Roman women, by acting as agents, incorporate specific strategies such as speeches intentionally to effect change for the good of the Roman populace.²⁷ Moreover, they use this type of power in response to the men who exercise "power over" over them in the form of victimization.

Which Women Overcome Their Victimization by Wielding Power?

As we saw earlier, women's victimization, including rape, precedes all major political developments in Livy's first pentad. The first of the major political developments set in the context of such victimization is the birth of Romulus, the founder of Rome. According to Livy, Amulius, the great-uncle of Romulus, desiring power, deposes his brother, Numitor, the king of Alba Longa, and kills his brother's sons. He also makes his niece Rhea Silvia, otherwise known as Ilia in different narratives, a Vestal Virgin under the pretense of honoring her but more to prevent her from conceiving and bearing children who could restore power to the rightful ruling line. Rhea Silvia, however, claims that she is raped by the god Mars.

²⁵Hartsock, 218.

²⁶Hartsock, 224.

²⁷Power described as linked to competence illustrates the "feminist theory" behind the meaning of power as seen in Hartsock, 218.

Vi compressa Vestalis cum geminum partum edidisset, seu ita rata seu quia deus auctor culpae honestior erat, Martem incertae stirpis patrem nuncupat (Livy I.IV.2-3).

After the Vestal, compelled by force, had brought forth twin progeny, whether she was thus certain or because a god was a more decent source for her crime, she named Mars as the father of her uncertain offspring.

Whoever causes her pregnancy, she conceives the twins Romulus and Remus, who later grow up and rightly take the throne away from their uncle.²⁸

As mentioned previously, speech is a form of wielding power and a form of acting independently for Livy's victimized women. In particular, Livy's Rhea Silvia acts independently by indirectly making a speech. Livy uses "*nuncupat*," or "she names," to demonstrate Rhea Silvia's speech and attributes Rhea Silvia with naming Mars as the father of her children.²⁹ Furthermore, through this indirect speech, Livy characterizes Rhea Silvia as the source of the story behind Romulus and Remus' parentage. By doing so, Livy demonstrates Rhea Silvia giving "power to" to her community by being the source of their prized legend, and, in turn, overcomes Amulius and Mars, who had wielded "power over" over her. Despite her victimization, Livy's Rhea Silvia wields power through speech.

Not only is Livy's Rhea Silvia an actor in her own right, but Livy also attributes her with characteristics that would elevate her position in the minds of his contemporary audience. Her role as Vestal Virgin is particularly important. In scholarly accounts, the importance of Rhea Silvia's position of Vestal Virgin, as depicted by Livy, however, is largely ignored.³⁰ There are few secondary accounts that focus on Rhea Silvia.³¹ This can be attributed to the fact that Livy mentions Rhea Silvia but does not linger. He skims over the fact that Rhea Silvia is a Vestal Virgin so that he may not offend his audience by emphasizing that she breaks her sacred vow. Even though Livy does not linger on his narrative of Rhea Silvia, her role as Vestal Virgin had great importance to his contemporary audience. According to Jo-Marie Claussen in "The Familiar Other: The Pivotal Role of Women in Livy's Narrative of Political Development in

²⁸Livy, III.10-I.V.7.

²⁹Livy, I.IV.3.

³⁰ Arieti, Claussen, Ogilvie.

³¹ Gersht and Mucznik.

Early Rome,” the characters in Livy are representations of people in his contemporary time.³² Since Rhea Silvia reflects Livy’s own time period, readers must understand the importance of the Vestal Virgins. Throughout Roman history, the rank of Vestal Virgin was of prime religious importance, despite the reluctance of parents to present their daughters as candidates for the priesthood. Furthermore, this was one of the few public positions available for women. Bauman, who describes the limited range of public offices available to Roman women, elaborates further:

[Women] were rigorously excluded from all official participation in public affairs, whether as voters, senators or magistrates; the only exception was priesthoods, to which they were admitted as Vestal Virgins and in a few other cases.³³

Even though Vestals Virgins may not have wielded any power in Rhea Silvia’s time, Livy’s contemporary audience would have attributed to her certain rights and privileges that Vestal Virgins held in Livy’s time because of their participation within the public sphere and close association with the important goddess Vesta. Vestal Virgins performed sacred rites, said prayers for Rome, and kept the sacred flame. Claussen, who describes the traditional Roman viewpoints of Livy’s time, states that

[Livy’s] attitude to women, we may assume, would have reflected the prevalent attitude of his time—or of his readership [the Roman élite].³⁴

Livy would have been aware of the predispositions of his contemporary audience. Even though the appeal for this priesthood was waning in Livy’s time, it still remained an important priesthood.

Many ancient sources give examples of the importance of the Vestal Virgins during Livy’s time. For example, according to Dio Cassius’ *Roman History*, Caesar Augustus deposited his will with the Vestal Virgins.³⁵ Additionally, according to Suetonius’ *De Vita Caesarum*, Augustus increased the Vestal Virgins’ numbers, privileges, and dignities. He was also a

³²Claussen, 73.

³³Bauman, 2.

³⁴Claussen, 72-73.

³⁵Dio Cassius, LVI.XXXII.1.

staunch supporter and patron of the Vestal Virgins and vowed that, if one of his granddaughters were to be of eligible age during a vacancy, her name would be on the list of candidates in order to encourage citizens to enroll their daughters in the service. In the midst of declining morality, at least in his mind, Augustus needed to encourage other citizens because parents were reluctant to place their daughters, who were needed to make political ties through marriage, in the priesthood.³⁶ Even though many Roman citizens were hesitant to enroll their daughters, no one can deny their prominence due to their rights and privileges. Since the position of a Vestal Virgin had a considerable amount of autonomy relative to other women in Livy's time, Rhea Silvia, by extension, holds a powerful position, for Livy's contemporary audience would have seen her position as such. Livy follows tradition and keeps his Rhea Silvia a Vestal Virgin because his contemporary audience recognized the importance of this role. By examining the life of this prominent legend, Livy's audience should learn lessons about proper behavior.

Not only did the Vestal Virgins figure importantly in Livy's time but they also possessed certain attributes which enhanced their exercise of power. According to Mary Beard in "The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins," the Vestals played virginal, matronly, and masculine roles.³⁷ In regard to their matronly role, in AD 9, Augustus conferred all the rights of mothers to the Vestal Virgins, legally making them matrons. In addition to matronly roles, Vestals were given the right to be accompanied by a lictor, a right held exclusively by men (except in the case of the deified Livia as Flaminica Divi Augusti). Also, they were the only women that were *testabiles*, or able to give testimony in court, and were allowed to leave their property in their wills to heirs without consultation with anyone.³⁸ All of these rights were masculine ones that allowed the Vestal Virgins to hold prestigious and powerful positions in relation to other women of the time.

Like Rhea Silvia, the Sabine women play an important role in the formation of the Roman state. Since all of its first inhabitants are men, Romulus attempts to make marriage

³⁶Suetonius, XXXI.1-4.

³⁷Beard (1980), 15.

³⁸Beard (1980), 17.

alliances with neighboring cities. All of his pleas, however, are denied because the neighboring cities are fearful of the rapid growth of Rome. Romulus, cognizant that his city will not survive his generation without women and children, designs a ploy to obtain wives. The Romans prepare the celebration of the *Consualia* in honor of the god Neptune and invite the neighboring cities. The towns of Caenina, Crustumium, and Antemnae, as well as the Sabine citizens, curious to see the fledgling city, come to the celebration. All is well until Romulus and his men rush upon the crowd and seize the women.

Vbi spectaculi tempus uenit deditaeque eo mentes cum oculis erant, tum ex composito orta uis signoque dato iuuentus Romana ad rapiendas uirgines discurrit (Livy I.IX.10-11).

When the time of the show came and their minds with their eyes were given to it, then from a signal prepared and given, a force arose, and the Roman youth ran about to abduct virgins.

The angry fathers eventually declare war and fighting soon commences. In the meantime, however, the women have become wives because of Romulus' arguments and because of the promise of the Roman husbands to make up for the Sabine parents. The wives, however, are not content with war waging. After the women continually implore Hersilia, Romulus' wife, to persuade Romulus to pardon their fathers, she eventually asks Romulus to allow the parents of the abducted women to live in Rome. Hersilia waits for the golden opportunity of a double victory to make her request. This is an intelligent move because Romulus is in an excellent mood and readily agrees.

duplicique uictoria ouantem Romulum Hersilia coniunx precibus raptarum fatigata orat ut parentibus earum det ueniam et in ciuitatem accipiat: ita rem coalescere concordia posse. Facile impetratum (I.XI.2).

And Hersilia his wife wearied by the pleas of the abducted women asked Romulus exulting in his double victory to pardon to their parents and accept them into citizenship: (saying that) in this way the state would be able to coalesce in harmony. Easily it was obtained by request.

Even though colonists from Crustumium, one of the towns from which the abducted women came, settle in Rome and colonists from Rome settle in Crustumium, fighting continues with the Sabines. In order to effect peace, the Sabine women, in the midst of battle, implore both their fathers and husbands to stop the fighting and make peace.

"Si adfinitatis inter uos, si conubii piget, in nos uertite iras; nos causa belli, nos uolnerum ac

caedium uiris ac parentibus sumus; melius peribimus quam sine alteris uestrum uiduae aut orbae uiuemus" (I.XIII.3).

"If our relationship, if our marriages are displeasing among you, turn your anger against us; we are the cause of the war, we are cause of the wounds and deaths for our husbands and our fathers; it is better for us to perish than to live widowed or orphaned without either of you."

Thanks to the bravery and convincing speech made by the Sabine women, the fighting immediately ceases, and the two armies are united under a single government at Rome.³⁹

In order to gain a better understanding of Livy's narrative, readers must understand the important roles the Sabine women play. The first powerful position the Sabine women hold is the role of the founding mothers, or *matres*, of Rome. Their children ensure that the city will survive for more than one generation. Being the founding mothers, the Sabines hold a powerful position because their children will ensure the continuance of the Roman race. Motherhood was one of the most important roles a Roman woman could achieve. Since mothers were responsible for the upbringing of future male citizens, the Romans particularly honored Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi brothers, because of her motherhood.⁴⁰ According to Dixon, who describes the importance of motherhood to a Roman woman,

In Rome, as in most societies, motherhood enhanced a woman's status. The achievements of her children, once grown, reflected on a mother, just as her moral reputation and inherited distinction conferred status on them. . . . The Roman emphasis was on the status which a mother gained, especially from distinguished sons.⁴¹

Not only were the Sabine women influential in extending the population of Rome beyond one generation but Livy's contemporary audience would also have seen them as important in instilling virtues to their sons even though Livy does not include the rearing of these sons in his narrative.

In addition, the Sabines are important as the unifiers of the Sabine race and the Roman race, for they are the ones to sue for peace. They accomplish a peace that Romulus cannot accomplish on his own. After Hersilia's pleading, Livy gives no mention of Romulus making a speech to the Sabines for peace. Through persuasion and pleading, the Sabine women

³⁹Livy, I.IX.1-I.XIII.8.

⁴⁰Bauman, 42.

⁴¹Dixon, 6, 73.

accomplish peace. In Livy's account, according to Joplin, the Sabine women speak as one body as a community of women for the first time in history:

For the first time, in an historical event that is construed as literally originating, a community of women act and speak together, and their articulation of a bond among women marks a moment when the female voice is actually powerful.⁴²

Livy's "community of women" give "power to" to their community by influencing their parents and husbands to make peace. By doing so, they transcend their previous status as victims in which their Roman husbands had wielded "power over" over them through abduction.

Moreover, the Sabine women's role was crucial to Livy's audience, as seen in the narratives of other contemporary writers who depict the scene. Writing a short time after Livy, Ovid, in the *Fasti*, also depicts the Sabine women positioning themselves, dressed as mourners, in the midst of the battle in-between their warring fathers and husbands.⁴³ As portrayed by both Livy and Ovid, such risking of their lives highlights the bravery of the Sabine women. Additionally in Livy, the way in which they persuade is a remarkably heroic deed. Even Livy implies this is unusual for women because they venture unarmed into the midst of battle. Vandiver, who describes the importance of this heroic deed, elaborates further:

The Sabines' courageous risk of their lives gives the impetus for the formation of a society that is finally, truly Roman: the seat of power is established at Rome, the marriages are accepted by the Sabines' fathers, and the two societies become one.⁴⁴

The intermingling and joining of the two peoples is essential for the fabric of the Roman populace as Livy's contemporary audience knew it. By characterizing the Sabine women as the impetus for peace, Livy elevates them. Their bravery is contradictory to the general stereotype of the Roman woman whom her brave male kin must protect. Livy demonstrates to his contemporary audience ways in which Roman women sometimes must risk something as important as life in order to benefit the Roman populace.

As portrayed by Livy, the heroic act of the Sabines does not go unnoticed. For their role in ending the war, *curiae*, or wards, of the city are named in honor of the Sabine women. Since

⁴²Joplin, 57.

⁴³Ovid (1978), III.221.

⁴⁴Vandiver, 214.

the *curiae* had Sabine names, the story of the Sabine women may be an aetiological myth.⁴⁵

Whatever the case, by giving them this honor, Romulus reinforces the importance of the Sabine women to Rome. Additionally, as Ovid presents in the *Fasti*, the ending of the war by the Sabine women is commemorated in a feast day on the first of March. Since the festival celebrates both Oeblian (Sabine) mothers and Rhea Silvia, it emphasizes the importance of motherhood.

One of the players in all of this that escapes sufficient notice is Hersilia, Romulus' wife. R. M. Ogilvie says in *A Commentary on Livy Books 1-5* that she is a woman with a daughter of her own when she comes to Rome.⁴⁶ Likewise, the majority of the ancient sources that writers such as Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus used say that Hersilia is not abducted along with the other Sabine women and that she is not married to Romulus.⁴⁷ Surprisingly, Livy makes his Hersilia the wife of Romulus. Even though Livy does not explicitly characterize her as one of the abducted women, one can assume that she is, for Livy does not mention her previous to the abduction. In his account, he empowers her with the position of queen, something which Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in contrast, does not.⁴⁸ Her role as queen is especially important because this is quite a powerful position to have for someone who is a victim. By being queen, she is in a position to influence and persuade Romulus. In this way, Livy shows that Roman women sometimes must work through the men in their lives to benefit Rome by the power of speech. Her speech to Romulus is especially important because Romulus allows the Crustumian parents as colonists to settle within his city. Even though Livy does not explicitly state that Romulus extends the right to settle to the people of Crustumium, we can infer that Hersilia influences him, for Romulus does not stop this settlement. By persuading Romulus to allow the people of Crustumium colonize Rome, Hersilia gives "power to" to her community. Since she may have been an abducted woman herself in Livy's account, she overcomes her status as an

⁴⁵Claussen, 85.

⁴⁶Ogilvie, 73.

⁴⁷Wiseman, 448.

⁴⁸Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1938), Earnest Cary trans., II.XLV.2.

abducted woman by influencing the very man who had wielded “power over” over her. Not only is Hersilia characterized by Livy as influential in obtaining peace between the Romans and the parents of the abducted women, she also was considered an important goddess in Livy’s time. According to tradition, Hersilia was apotheosized as Hora Quirini, “the power of Quirinus (Romulus),” after her death.⁴⁹ To the Romans, then Hersilia was recognized as a contributor to Romulus’ power and is one of the reasons behind his greatness.

Like Rhea Silvia, the Sabine women, and Hersilia, Lucretia also holds a powerful position in the formation of Rome as portrayed by Livy. During the reign of the last king of Rome, a contest for the most virtuous wife develops among the Roman soldiers away on campaign at Ardea. In order to win the contest, Collatinus, Lucretia’s husband, suggests they visit their wives in secret. The majority of the men find their wives drinking and partying, typical of adulterous women.⁵⁰ Collatinus, however, discovers his wife Lucretia spinning, typical of a chaste woman. After the men are invited into the home, Sextus Tarquinius, the arrogant and brash third son of the tyrannical king Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, begins to lust after Lucretia and vows to take away her purity. Later on, when Collatinus is away, Sextus visits Lucretia with the sole purpose of ravishing her. He is invited into her home as a guest, waits until the household is asleep, and rapes Lucretia. Lucretia only yields to Sextus after he threatens to kill her and a slave and place their naked bodies next to one another in order to simulate that she was caught in adultery with a slave. After Sextus leaves, Lucretia immediately sends messengers to her father and husband to ask them to bring trusted friends, one of which is Brutus. When the men arrive, Lucretia relates the rape to her family. Even though the men assure her that she is innocent, Lucretia stabs herself in order to set a precedent for women who might use her as an excuse to commit adultery.

“Vos” inquit “uideritis quid illi debeatur: ego me etsi peccato absoluo, supplicio non libero; nec ulla deinde impudica Lucretiae exemplo uiuet.” Cultrum, quem sub ueste abditum habebat, eum

⁴⁹Ogilvie, 73. According to Ogilvie, “hora should be connected with *horior* and *hortor* and taken to mean ‘the power of Quirinus’.”

⁵⁰Bauman, 12.

in corde defigit, prolapsaque in uolnus moribunda cecedit. Conclamat uir paterque (Livy I.LVIII.10-12).

She said, “You will see what is owed to him: although I absolve myself from sin, I am not free from punishment; and afterward no unchaste women will live with the example of Lucretia.” In her heart, she thrust a knife, which she was holding concealed under her clothing, and died having collapsed onto the wound. Her husband and father bewailed her death.

Brutus, who had previously been pretending to be half-witted so that the king would not kill him as he had killed his brother, now reveals his true self and vows to expel the kings from Rome, thereby creating the Republic.⁵¹

The most troubling aspect of the majority of scholarship on this episode on this story is the focus on Lucretia’s rape.⁵² Lucretia’s subsequent actions must be examined instead of focusing just on the rape. She does, however, bring about the formation of the Roman Republic with her suicide after being raped. By serving as a catalyst, Lucretia holds a powerful position, for, without her, Roman society may not have evolved further. Even though the commoners are thoroughly disgusted by the excesses of the Tarquin family (the siege of Ardea is waged by the king in order to secure more wealth for his family),⁵³ they need a breaking point at which to overthrow the Tarquins, and Lucretia serves as this breaking point. By characterizing Lucretia as a catalyst to benefit Rome, Livy depicts Lucretia as honorable, brave, and moral.

By this depiction, Livy characterizes his Lucretia in order to promote morality. To begin with, Livy’s Lucretia remains in her own home. Since Roman men had legal rights over their wives,⁵⁴ Livy characterizes Lucretia as acting as a proper Roman matron. Lucretia waits to commit suicide until her husband, her legal guardian, can witness it because women were not allowed to conduct even personal affairs without the supervision of a male guardian. His narrative differs from the account of Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who was a contemporary of Livy, in that Dionysius’ Lucretia leaves her home and does not act as a proper matron should.

⁵¹Livy, I.LVII.6-I.LVIX.2.

⁵²Arieti, Bowen, Claussen, Donaldson, Holleman, Joplin, Joshel, Ogilvie, Philippides, Small.

⁵³Livy, I.LVI.1-2.

⁵⁴Claussen, 93.

She dresses in black, hides a dagger underneath her clothing, and speeds away to the home of her father who is giving a party. Moreover, she acts quite subversively and herself seems to be the rallying force behind the overthrow of the Tarquins by gathering a great crowd to which to relate her story. She says to her father,

“You will hear of my misfortunes very soon, father; but first grant me this favour I ask of you. Send for as many of your friends and kinsmen as you can, so that they may hear the report from me, the victim of terrible wrongs, rather than from others. And when you have learned to what shameful and dire straits I was reduced, consult with them in what manner you will avenge both me and yourself. But do not let the time between be long.” When, in response to his hasty and urgent summons, the most prominent men had come to his house as she desired, she began at the beginning and told them all that had happened. Then, after embracing her father and addressing many entreaties both to him and to all present and praying to the gods and other divinities to grant her a speedy departure from life, she drew the dagger she was keeping concealed under her robes, and plunging it into her breast, with a single stroke pierced her heart.⁵⁵

In Dionysius of Halicarnassus’ narrative, Lucretia does not wait to commit suicide until her husband can witness it. This contrasts with Livy’s account in which Lucretia acts properly by waiting for her husband.

In addition to acting as a catalyst, Livy’s Lucretia also sets an important precedent for would-be adulterous women. Vandiver, who describes the importance of Lucretia’s precedent, states:

In her case, her life would no longer contribute to the greater good of society. If she continued to live after her rape, this would leave open the possibility that other women could, in fact, willingly commit adultery and claim that they had been forced, thus undermining the entire moral framework of marriage and by extension of society insofar as it depends on regulated and recognized forms of marriage for its continuance.⁵⁶

In order to eliminate the possibility that she might serve as an excuse, Lucretia believes that she must die in a heroic deed of self-sacrifice in order to preserve the social order. No other Roman woman after her would be able to participate in an adulterous affair without consequences. Lucretia gives “power to” to her community by making this precedent which she explains in a speech and executes with her heroic death. Vandiver, who believes that Lucretia is a courageous paradigm of female virtue, states:

The blameless Lucretia dies for the same reason that blameless soldiers die, for the greater good of Rome.... Her voluntary death shows, without equivocation, the possibility of self-sacrifice and

⁵⁵Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1939), IV.LXVI.2-IV.LXVII.2.

⁵⁶Vandiver, 215, 216.

courage on the part of private citizens, female as well as male, when necessity requires it.⁵⁷

Her bravery goes hand in hand with Brutus—Brutus achieves political freedom by overthrowing the Tarquins whereas Lucretia achieves a freedom defined by moral excellence. Moreover, in the *Fasti*, Ovid describes Lucretia as an *animi matrona virilis*, “a matron of manly spirit.”⁵⁸ In classical times, Lucretia was generally considered heroic,⁵⁹ and Livy’s contemporary audience would have applauded her actions.⁶⁰ Not only is her precedent heroic, but she also rallies the men onto action through a speech. Through this speech, Lucretia gives “power to” to her community because she spurs the men onto create the Roman Republic in order to avenge her rape and death. Furthermore, she conquers her violation by Sextus, who had wielded “power over” over her through rape.

Livy characterizes Rhea Silvia, the Sabine women, Hersilia, and Lucretia in prominent positions so that his contemporary audience would have taken note of their actions. All of these women can thus serve as heroic *exempla* for both genders to follow. Livy presents them all as victims, but as victims who can transcend their situations. Since Livy stresses their ability to do so, he demonstrates that not only are they victims but they also are actors in their own right. In contrast, Livy characterizes Verginia as an epitome of a victim who cannot overcome her suppression. In addition, Verginia’s victimization helps distinguish how the other women are terrorized as well.

How is Each Woman a Victim?

Appius Claudius threatens Verginia, who is herself also influential in the legends of early

⁵⁷Vandiver, 216.

⁵⁸Ovid (1978), II.847.

⁵⁹Donaldson, 145.

⁶⁰Ovid (1978), V.727; Bowen, 13. Not only does Livy’s Lucretia set an important precedent for the formation of Rome but also she is part of an aetiological myth for a religious festival. According to Ovid’s *Fasti*, the Romans celebrated the *Regifugium*, the flight of the Tarquin kings, on February 24. This day was called *dies nefastus*, “a day contrary to divine law.” The consuls would then take over in March, which was the first month of the year until the second century BC.

Roman history, with rape. Livy remarks that her story has the same consequences and is as vile as Lucretia's.⁶¹ Even though Livy links the narratives of Lucretia and Verginia with the issue of rape, their narratives have many differences due to their own unique social standings. During the decemvirate in which the Twelve Tables, the first written record of Roman law, are being codified, Verginia is a young maiden betrothed to a man named Lucius Icilius. The decemvir Appius Claudius, who is the corrupt leader of the second decemvirate, lusts after Verginia. One day, he has his client Claudius seize her on the false claim that Verginia's mother was once his slave; therefore, by being her daughter, Verginia is his slave as well.

Virgini uenienti in forum--ibi namque in tabernaculis litterarum ludi erant--minister decemviri libidinis manum iniecit, serua sua natam seruamque appellans; se sequi iubebat: cunctantem ui abstracturum. Pauida puella stupente, ad clamorem nutricis fidem Quiritium implorantis fit concursus; Vergini patris sponsique Icili populare nomen celebrabatur (III.XLIV.6-7).

Naming her as a slave born from his slave, the agent of the decemvir's lust put his hands on the maiden coming into the forum--for there in tents were the schools of literature--; he ordered that she follow: if she hesitated, she would be dragged away by force. With the fearful girl stunned, a crowd of Romans gathered at the cry of her entreating nurse; the popular name of her father Verginius and fiancée Icilius was made known.

The crowd is immediately enraged, and Claudius sues to go to court to prove his "legal" claim. Yet, Appius Claudius is the presiding judge, just as he had planned. Icilius pleads for her to remain a virgin bride and not to be hurt. Appius Claudius, however, intent on having Verginia for himself, rules against Verginia's advocates and does not let her father Lucius Verginius speak on her behalf. In order to preserve her virtue over her life, her father stabs her to death. This serves as a breaking point for the plebeians, who gather together to demand the dissolution of the second decemvirate, the right to have their tribunes back, and the right to appeal. The senate grants their requests.⁶²

Although Verginia does serve as a catalyst for the overthrowing of the second decemvirate, she is remarkably different from the other women discussed previously. Serving as an inadvertent catalyst appears to be the only powerful position in which she is placed. Even

⁶¹Livy, III.XLIV.1.

⁶²Livy, III.XLIV.1-III.XLVIII.9.

though Livy says that stories of Verginia and Lucretia are linked,⁶³ Verginia does not speak at all and thus appears as an epitome of a victim, unlike the alleged victims previously discussed.

Verginia is thoroughly a victim because she remains completely silent throughout the entire narrative. In every narrative in which she figures, she remains completely mute, and others must speak on her behalf because she makes no independent decisions. In her first appearance, when Claudius, Appius Claudius' client, seizes her, making her dumb with fright, her nurse is the one who screams for help to attract the crowd. In court, her advocates speak on her behalf, and Livy does not provide her opinion on the situation. Since only Vestal Virgins were allowed to give testimony in court, Verginia's lack of testimony does not come as a surprise.⁶⁴ Additionally, since Livy has characterized Verginia as a maiden, only her father has legal right to her; therefore, Verginia would be unable to speak on her behalf. Livy then depicts Appius Claudius as unlawful by denying Verginius the right to speak in court on behalf of Verginia. According to Claussen, who describes the legal rights of fathers and husbands,

Under Roman law a woman *in manu* technically was a permanent legal minor to be passed from father to husband. . . . For Icilius, his right to a virgin bride was all-important, for Verginius, the display of his *patriapotestas*.⁶⁵

Claussen's statement describes to what extent husbands' and fathers' rights superseded those of wives and daughters. Only her father has the legal claim to speak on her behalf whereas Collatinus, Lucretia's husband, would have the right to speak on Lucretia's behalf. Even though Verginia does not consciously choose to change her situation, Livy does characterize her as acting in a proper way. She remains mute so that her father might speak for her.

Speech can equal power. Since Verginia does not utter a single word, she is not portrayed as holding a powerful position. She does not wield power in contrast to the other women in "rape" situations because she makes absolutely no choices. For this reason, Verginia can only be considered a victim and not an actor in her own right. Livy characterizes her as a

⁶³Livy, III.XLIV.1.

⁶⁴Beard (1980), 17.

⁶⁵Claussen, 93, 94.

mute victim because Verginia is only a maiden whose position necessitates the guardianship of her father. Even though Verginius, if he were a Roman living in Livy's time, would speak and act on his daughter's behalf, Livy still presents Verginia as the epitome of a victim because of her lack of speech and her lack of action.

Livy characterizes Verginia as threatened by rape. A digression at this point is necessary to distinguish the way in which Romans viewed the act of rape. Many scholars have often wrongly grouped the victimizations of the Sabine women and Rhea Silvia in the same category with Verginia and Lucretia because of a misinterpretation of the Latin word *rapere*.⁶⁶ Even though many scholars translate *rapta* as "raped woman,"⁶⁷ *stuprum* has the closest meaning to our English connotation of rape. *Stuprum* literally means "illicit sexual intercourse."⁶⁸ In Livy, we can find many instances in which *stuprum* is used in connection with Verginia's story. For example, at the beginning of Verginia's account, Livy states,

Ap. Claudium uirginis plebeiae stuprandae libido cepit (Livy III.XLIV.2).

Desire for raping a plebian maiden seized Appius Claudius.

In addition, when Verginius becomes outraged at Appius Claudius' verdict,

"Icilio" inquit, "Appi, non tibi filiam despondi et ad nuptias, non ad stuprum educaui" (III.XLVII.7).

He said, "Appius, I promised my daughter in marriage to Icilius, not to you, and I reared her for the purpose of marriage, not for the purpose of rape."

When Verginius decides that he must kill his daughter in order to protect her virginity, *stuprum* is again mentioned:

sibi uitam filiae sua cariorem fuisse, si liberae ac pudicae uiuere licitum fuisset: cum uelut seruam ad stuprum rapi uideret, morte amitti melius ratum quam contumelia liberos (III.L.6-7).

To him the life of his daughter would have been dearer than his own life, if she had been permitted to live free and chaste: since he saw that she was abducted like a slave for the purpose of rape, he thought that it was better to lose his children by death than ignominy.

This last quote is extremely important because it contains both *rapi*, "to be abducted," and

⁶⁶Beard (1999), Claussen, Joplin, Joshel, Ogilvie, Wiseman.

⁶⁷Beard (1999), Claussen, Joplin, Joshel, Ogilvie, Wiseman.

⁶⁸Vandiver, 209; Bauman, 12.

stuprum, “rape.” Continuing the ruse that Verginia is a slave of Claudius, Appius’ client, Appius rules against Verginius and Verginia. By this ruling, Claudius seizes Verginia as his slave so that Appius may rape her. Since Appius does not rape Verginia (her father kills her before that happens), *rapi* cannot be taken as “to be raped.” Instead, abduction is the nearest connotation to its meaning because the quote would not make sense if *rapi* and *stuprum* were translated in the same way.

Likewise, in the case of Livy’s Lucretia, she is a victim of rape because there is no question that *stuprum* is the nature of her victimization. When Brutus makes a speech to the crowd, he makes sure that they know that Lucretia was raped by talking “*de stupro infando Lucretiae*” (“about the abominable rape of Lucretia”).⁶⁹ Also, before Verginia’s account, Livy mentions that Lucretia was raped.⁷⁰ Since *stuprum* is used in the case of Lucretia instead of *rapere*, the nature of Lucretia’s and Verginia’s victimizations are similar because both involve rape. The nature of the victimization of the Sabine women is different from Lucretia and Verginia since *stuprum* is never mentioned in those cases.

Unlike Verginia, Lucretia cannot be considered an epitome of a victim because she consciously makes decisions despite being raped. Furthermore, in Livy, Lucretia, the Sabine women, and Rhea Silvia act, and this distinguishes them from Verginia. The distinguishing factor is that they all make independent decisions. According to Vandiver, who describes their independent actions,

These women [Lucretia and the Sabine women] do not by any means wait for their men (husbands, fathers, or brothers) to tell them what to do; in fact, one of their most noticeable shared characteristics is that they all act on their own initiative, at times against the direct advice of men.⁷¹

Although Vandiver is certainly correct, Rhea Silvia’s narrative deserves clearer examination, for Livy gives her indirect speech. By acting independently, Lucretia, like the Sabine women, transcends the simple stereotype of victim. We cannot, however, make the same mistake

⁶⁹Livy, I.LIX.8.

⁷⁰Livy, III.XLIV.1.

⁷¹Vandiver, 207.

grouping all of these women under the same characterization. They make unique decisions with unique outcomes.

To begin with, Lucretia's decisions must be explored, both before and after her rape by Sextus Tarquinius, must be explored. Before the rape, she continuously denies Sextus Tarquinius until he threatens to kill a slave and put his naked body next to her dead, naked body to simulate the act of adultery. She only yields in order to match her word against his.

Quo terrore cum uicisset obstinatam pudicitiam uelut uictrix libido, profectusque inde Tarquinius ferox expugnato decore muliebri esset . . . (Livy I.LVIII.5).

When by this terror lust, as if victorious, had overcome her resolute chastity, and then fierce Tarquinius, having conquered the grace of a woman, had departed. . . .

Since she lives to speak and to act, Lucretia wields power. She sends messengers to her father and husband to beg them to return with trusted friends. When they arrive, she gives a speech, relating the incident.

Sex. est Tarquinius qui hostis pro hospite priore nocte ui armatus mihi sibique, si uos uiri estis, pestiferum hinc abstulit gaudium (I.LVIII.8-9).

Sextus Tarquinius is the one, who, last night, armed with violence as an enemy instead of a guest, stole from here a delight destructive to me and to him, if you are men.

By her final challenge “*si uos uiri estis*,” or “if you are men,” she spurs the men on for a revolt against the wickedness of the Tarquins. She additionally makes the choice to kill herself to prevent adulterous women from using her as a precedent to have illicit sexual relations without consequences. By the power of speech and the ability to make choices, Lucretia is an actor in her own right. Although victimized by rape, she wields power. For this reason, she cannot be lumped in the same category with Verginia. She is a victim who responds by acting, and acting nobly.

Like Lucretia, the Sabine women are more than just victims. According to Vandiver, who believes that scholarship has not gone far enough in analyzing the actions of the Sabine women and Lucretia,

Modern critics have tended to see both the Sabine women and Lucretia as helpless and passive victims in these scenes in which the women propose their own deaths. I think that this view is profoundly mistaken and does not do justice to the women's roles in the text; these women are

actors and agents in their own rights.⁷²

The approach that sees the Sabine women and Lucretia only as victims is too simple because it does not give them credit for acting in addition to being victimized. Even so, when comparing Livy's narratives, we see that the Sabine women make markedly different decisions from Lucretia's.

In contrast to both Verginia and Lucretia, the Sabine women are not victimized by rape or the threat of it. Rather, Livy shows in his choice of Latin vocabulary that abduction is the source of their victimization. Although the abduction of the Sabine women is certainly chaotic, causing Mary Beard in "The Erotics of Rape: Livy, Ovid and the Sabine Women" to believe that the women are raped in both narratives, they, in fact, are not raped in Livy's account.⁷³

In order to analyze the abduction, the language used by Livy must be examined. According to Vandiver, a careful reading of Livy will show that the women are not raped at all.⁷⁴ According to Vandiver, who believes that Lucretia and the Sabine women cannot be linked because of the misinterpretation of the word *rapere*,

This [*stuprum*] is the word used to describe Sextus Tarquinius's crime against Lucretia; it is not used in reference to the Sabine women.⁷⁵

Since Livy is careful enough to make sure the reader knows that Verginia and Lucretia must be associated with *stuprum*, by using only *rapta* in his story of the Sabines' abduction, he characterizes the abduction of the Sabines differently than Verginia and Lucretia.

In Livy, the first emotion that the Sabines have toward their abductors is indignation. They also lose their resentment toward the Romans rather quickly after Romulus reassures them and after their husbands promise to make up for the homes and parents that they lost.⁷⁶ Since they lose their resentment so quickly, Livy characterizes them not as victims of rape. Instead, he

⁷²Vandiver, 214.

⁷³Beard (1999), 1.

⁷⁴Vandiver, 209.

⁷⁵Vandiver, 209.

⁷⁶Livy, I.X.1

presents the Sabines as partners in wealth, citizenship, and the bearing of children with their Roman husbands. Wives certainly have these rights, and this is the way in which Livy wants his audience to see them.

In addition, the reactions and prejudices applied by Livy's contemporary audience are important to examine. Since the abduction of the Sabines guaranteed the survival of their nation, the Romans saw the union between the Sabines and Romans as legitimate in order for the Romans themselves to be a legitimate people. Therefore, the Romans construed the sexual relations between the Sabines and Romans as consensual, not illicit. Since consensual intercourse only occurred within the confines of marriage for the Romans, this union is also within the confines of marriage. Following the traditional viewpoints of his contemporary audience, Livy characterizes the Sabine women as legitimate wives. In addition, *pudicitia*, or "chastity," was prized as a great virtue for Roman wives. This virtue was lost through illicit sexual intercourse, including rape.⁷⁷ Vandiver, who describes the importance of *pudicitia* to Roman brides, states:

Here again it is important to realize that the Sabine women were not raped; if they had been, then as good chaste Roman women concerned with their *pudicitia*, they should react as Lucretia does. And, if the Sabine women had been raped, then the Roman men would be the equivalents of Sextus Tarquinius.⁷⁸

The Romans of Livy's time did not take pride in a man like Sextus Tarquinius but did in a man like Romulus, from whom they were proud to be descended. Likewise, although Livy does not describe the actual marriage ceremonies, according to Gary B. Miles in *Livy: Reconstructing Early Rome*, ceremonies did take place to legitimize the unions:

The narratives of Livy, Ovid, and Plutarch do not report a formal wedding after the abduction. Nonetheless, even though the relationship between Sabine women and Roman men begins with abduction, it ends in these narratives with a legitimate marriage. According to Livy, when the abducted women intervene between Romans and Sabines as they confront each other in the Roman Forum, the women describe their fathers as fathers-in-law (*soceri*), their abductors as sons-in-law (*generi*), their own offspring as the grandchildren of their fathers (*nepotes*) and the legitimate children (*liberi*) of their abductors (1.13.2).⁷⁹

⁷⁷Vandiver, 209.

⁷⁸Vandiver, 213.

⁷⁹Miles, 181.

Therefore, modern audiences should interpret the abduction of the Sabines as resulting in a legitimate marriage with all of the proper Roman customs known to Livy's contemporary audience.

Not only is the union between the Sabines and Romans a legitimate marriage, but it is also, according to Beard, the aetiological myth for the first Roman marriage.⁸⁰ After the abduction, the marriage laws of *iustum conubium* are enacted by Romulus. Since these laws were used by Romans of Livy's time, all of the details of a proper Roman marriage had to have been in place before the Sabine abduction. Additionally, T. P. Wiseman mentions in "The Wife and Children of Romulus" that this event is an aetiological myth.⁸¹ Although the marriage customs of the Romans seem brutal by modern standards, the Romans, for the most part, did not see them as such. They were proud of their ancestry.

Since the Sabines would have to have been virgins and would have consented to their marriage before marriages could take place with the Romans, Livy shows that the Sabines had a choice, which contrasts with Verginia, who is characterized as having lacked a choice. Although the situation in which the Sabine women are placed seems criminal, the fact that they are given a choice of marriage lessens, in a way, the culpability of Romulus and his men. Vandiver, who sees the importance of the Sabine women's consent for legitimate marriages to the Romans, argues:

I am not attempting to excuse or deny the violence of their abduction, but once that abduction is a *fait accompli*, the Sabine women are actors in their own rights whose consent is an important element in their story.⁸²

Livy does not state that the Sabines are raped. He intentionally refrains from using *stuprum* so that his contemporary audience would see the Sabine women joining in legitimate marriages to their Roman husbands. Since the Sabine women had to have consented before a marriage could have taken place, they make the voluntary choice to marry their Roman abductors. As Susan

⁸⁰Beard (1999), 1-2.

⁸¹Wiseman, 446.

⁸²Vandiver, 212.

Treggiari states in *Roman Marriage: Iusti Coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian*, “The giving of consent gave rise to a marriage.”⁸³ As Vandiver, who sees the consent of the Sabine women as an important step for the formation of a legitimate Roman society, states:

The Sabine women’s voluntary acceptance of their role as the *matres* of the Roman people is the essential condition for the emergence of this new *civitas*.⁸⁴

Accepting the role of *matres* ensures the formation of a legitimate society. Joplin surmises that the Sabines may be too frightened not to consent.⁸⁵ But, Livy does not describe them thus. We examine only base their emotions as presented by Livy, who implies that they make the choice to marry the Romans. In particular, Livy’s Hersilia also makes important choices after her abduction. She persuades Romulus to allow the Sabine parents to live in Rome. All of her choices stem from the power to make a speech which persuades others to follow her. By making choices, Hersilia, along with the Sabine women cannot be considered just victims; they do wield power.

In addition to Hersilia and the Sabine women, Livy’s Rhea Silvia makes independent decisions even though she may be a victim of rape. Although Livy relates that Rhea Silvia says that Mars forced her to consent to sexual relations, there is no account of the actual rape in Livy’s history. This seems puzzling, for subsequent rapes like Lucretia’s are presented in much detail. The lack of detail presented by Livy probably is due to the mythical nature of the story involving a god. Regardless, the brevity of the story leads to many questions. Is Rhea Silvia raped? Or, is this a lie to conceal her culpability? To begin with, in the preface of his history, Livy neither accepts nor dismisses Mars’ parentage because he believes the tale of Rhea Silvia and Mars is purely legendary. Furthermore, he almost dismisses the entire narrative by stating that he will give no great importance to legends such as this one.⁸⁶ Moreover, in the first book, he calls Rhea Silvia’s children “*incertae stirpis*,” “uncertain offspring.” Additionally, he gives

⁸³Treggiari, 170.

⁸⁴Vandiver, 215.

⁸⁵Joplin, 57.

⁸⁶Livy, *Praefatio* 7-9.

two reasons for her pregnancy: Mars is truly the father or this is a story to conceal her guilt. Moreover, neither *rapta* nor *stuprum* is used in connection with Rhea Silvia. The reader is left to question for himself what the nature of the sexual relation is. Instead of *rapta* or *stuprum*, Livy says, “*vi compressa Vestalis*” (“the Vestal compelled by force”).⁸⁷ Even though force is a part of rape, why is Livy so precise in telling the reader that *stuprum* was the action in the case of Verginia and Lucretia but not for Rhea Silvia? Perhaps he was not sure himself what to believe about Rhea Silvia; therefore, the reader is allowed to make his own guesses. Livy could not have presented Rhea Silvia willingly consenting to sexual relations because this would be an immoral act for her. Since sexual relations were completely forbidden for a Vestal Virgin, intercourse for her would have been the ultimate *stuprum*. Livy’s contemporary audience would have been thoroughly shocked if Rhea Silvia were to have any form of sexual encounter. Livy’s ambiguous language certainly softens the blow for his audience, allowing them to come to their own conclusions. Furthermore, during Livy’s lifetime, the depiction of Rhea Silvia and Mars in art had recently become popular. Due to the research done by Rivka Gersht and Sonia Mucznik in “Mars and Rhea Silvia,” we know that there are no extant artistic depictions of the rape of Rhea Silvia before the first century BC.⁸⁸ Since this type of art became popular during Livy’s lifetime, certainly there was pressure to keep Rhea Silvia a victim by Livy’s audience. They were already accustomed to seeing her as a victim because the mythical nature of her story worked well in artistic depictions. Additionally, according to Claussen, Rhea Silvia’s account “partakes of all elements of a fairy tale” due to the presence of the god Mars.⁸⁹ The almost “fairy tale” aspect of Rhea Silvia’s account also opens the way for the reader to come to his or her own conclusions.

Even though Livy’s audience would have been shocked by any sexual encounter Rhea Silvia may have had, Tibullus, who was a younger contemporary of Livy, seems to believe that Rhea Silvia willingly gave herself to Mars.

⁸⁷Livy, I.IV.2.

⁸⁸Gersht and Mucznik, 133.

⁸⁹Claussen, 80.

*te quoque iam uideo, Marti placitura sacerdos
Ilia, Vestales deseruisse focos,
concubitusque tuos furtim uitaeque iacentes
et cupidi ad ripas arma relictas dei* (Tibullus II.V.51-54).

Now I see that you also, Ilia, a priestess, about to satisfy Mars,
have deserted the sacred Vestal hearths,
and I see your secret copulations and your fillets lying still
and the passionate god's weapons abandoned near the riverbanks.

Would Tibullus' contemporary audience also have been shocked by these lines? Possibly. But, poets, in Livy's time, had greater room in which to voice their opinions according to E. J.

Kenney in *Cambridge History of Classical Literature*.⁹⁰ Additionally, Tibullus was a love poet, and he wrote poetry reflecting love. History, on the other hand, was more conservative.⁹¹ Livy would not have been so bold as to write lines like Tibullus' for his account because, as stated in his preface, he writes to uplift morality. However, Livy may have left important details out of his account since he does not address Rhea Silvia's situation as *stuprum*. By examining Tibullus' account, one can see further evidence that the idea that Rhea Silvia was not raped existed during the Augustan era.

Since Tibullus seems to believe the pregnancy of Rhea Silvia did not result from a rape at all, the presentation of Rhea Silvia having a choice as to whether or not to consent to sexual relations may have been available for Livy to use, but he adheres to tradition by choosing not to present her explicitly in this way. In addition, Rhea Silvia's pregnancy may not have been divine. Livy seems skeptical as to who was the father of her children. Livy's contemporary audience would have seen Rhea Silvia's breaking of her vow of chastity as a grave dishonor to her position, punishable by death.

Moreover, the view that Rhea Silvia made choices concerning her unborn children is present in other Latin literature even though Livy does not explicitly reflect the same views. According to Ovid in the *Fasti*, Rhea Silvia possesses the gift of prophecy in addition to the role

⁹⁰Kenney, 134.

⁹¹Kenney, 163.

of Vestal Virgin. After her encounter with Mars, Rhea Silvia has a vision of two palm trees that are saved from her uncle by a woodpecker, the bird of Mars, and a she-wolf.

*languida consurgit, nec scit cur languida surgat,
et peragit tales arbore nixa sonos:
“utile sit faustumque, precor, quod imagine somni
vidimus; an somno clarius illud erat?
ignibus Iliacis aderam, cum lapsa capillis
dedit ante sacros lanea vitta focos.
inde duae pariter, visu mirabile, palmae
surgunt: ex illis altera maior erat,
et gravibus ramis totum protexerat orbem
contigeratque sua sidera summa coma.
ecce meus ferrum patruus molitur in illas:
terror admonitu, corque timore micat.
Martia, picus, avis gemino pro stipite pugnant
et lupa: tuta per hos utraque palma fuit (Ovid Fasti III.25-38).”*

Languid she [Ilia] rises, and does not know why she rises languid,
and having leaned against a tree relates the sounds of such a kind:
“May it be useful and auspicious, I pray, what I saw in an image
of sleep; or was it rather clear in sleep?
I was near the fire of Ilium, when the woolen fillet
having slipped from my hair fell before the sacred hearth.
From this place two palm trees together rose, in a miraculous
sight: from them one was greater than the other,
and by its heavy branches it had covered the entire world
and had touched the highest stars with its leaves.
Behold my paternal uncle propelled a sword against them:
I was terrified by the admonition, and my heart throbbed with fear.
A woodpecker, the bird of Mars, and a she-wolf fought for
the twin trunks: both of the palm trees were safe through them.”

Ovid’s Rhea Silvia has the gift of prophecy. These palm trees are her unborn children, Romulus and Remus. With the gift of prophecy, Rhea Silvia knows the greatness her unborn children will have.

In turn, we can infer that Ovid thought that she could make the choice to carry her children to term because of this vision. By this choice, she knowingly ensures that the founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, are born. In the *Amores*, written during his youth, Ovid advises his *domina* not to attempt another abortion because she may kill a future Roman hero. He argues that if Ilia were to have aborted Romulus and Remus, then Rome would never have been founded:

Ilia si tumido geminos in uentre necasset,

casurus dominae conditor Urbis erat (Ovid *Amores* II.XIV.15-16).

If Ilia had killed her twins in her swollen womb,
the founder of the dominant City would have been slain.

As presented by Ovid, Rhea Silvia makes the choice to carry her children to term because she realizes the important role they will play, but Ovid does not state in this poem whether or not Rhea Silvia knows that Mars is their father.

Given all the information about Rhea Silvia, readers discover that, during the Augustan era, many views concerning Rhea Silvia were present, including her choice to bear her children. In a different characterization of Rhea Silvia, Dionysius of Halicarnassus suggests in his narrative that she may have purposefully become pregnant in order to thwart her uncle. Since girls were placed into the service of the Vestal Virgins at a young age, we can only guess that the same holds true for Rhea Silvia as in Livy's account. Aulus Gellius says that young girls were placed into the service of the Vestal Virgins.⁹² Even though this was the norm for Vestal Virgins in Livy's time, the same does not hold true for Dionysius' Rhea Silvia. Dionysius explains the customs of the Alban Vestal Virgins. King Numa, who reigns after Romulus, is known for making specific rules for the Vestal Virgins, including placing girls at a young age into the service and prohibiting sexual relations for thirty years. However, for the Albans, during Rhea Silvia's own mythical time, to place the eldest daughter in the service of the Vestal Virgins and for her to remain chaste as a Vestal for at least five years were customary.

Those holy maidens who were entrusted with the custody of the perpetual fire and with the carrying out of any other rites that it was customary for virgins to perform in behalf of the commonwealth, were required to remain undefiled by marriage for a period of not less than five years. Amulius was carrying out his plan under specious pretences, as if he were conferring honour and dignity on his brother's family; for he was not the author of this law, which was a general one, nor, again, was his brother the first person of consideration whom he had obliged to yield obedience to it, but it was both customary and honourable among the Albans for maidens of the highest birth to be appointed to the service of Vesta.⁹³

In his version, Dionysius makes sure that his reader knows what age his Rhea Silvia is.

⁹² Aulus Gellius, I.XII.1-2.

⁹³ Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1938), I.LXXVI.3-4. Dionysius of Halicarnassus states that he received his information orally from men of the greatest learning and from the written accounts of the following historians: Porcius Cato, Fabius Maximus, Valerius Antias, Licinius Macer, the Aelii, Gelii, and Calpurnii, and many others (I.XII.3). Livy may have used all or some of the same sources as well.

He also presents more possibilities of the father of Rhea Silvia's children. Since he and Livy both used the same ancient sources, Dionysius' version is important to note, for he supplies different details. Like Livy, however, Dionysius is ambiguous about the father of Rhea Silvia's children but proposes three options: one of her suitors, her uncle Amulius himself, or Mars.

The fourth year after this [being placed into the service of the Vestal Virgins and the murder of her brother by Amulius], Ilia, upon going to a grove consecrated to Mars to fetch pure water for the use in sacrifices, was ravished by somebody or other in the sacred precinct. Some say that the author of the deed was one of the maiden's suitors, who was carried away by his passion for the girl; others say that it was Amulius himself, and that, since his purpose was to destroy her quite as much as to satisfy his passion, he had arrayed himself in such an armour as would render him most terrible to behold and that he also kept his features disguised as effectively as possible. But most writers relate a fabulous story to the effect that it was a spectre of the divinity to whom the place was consecrated; and they add that the adventure was attended by many supernatural signs, including a sudden appearance of the sun and a darkness that spread over the sky, and that the appearance of the spectre was far more marvellous than that of a man both in stature and in beauty.⁹⁴

Dionysius continues his narrative with Rhea Silvia feigning illness so that she would be not expected to perform the sacrifices. Her mother thus advises her so that she may not pollute the rituals. Amulius eventually finds out that she is pregnant and accuses his brother Numitor and Numitor's wife of conspiring to impregnate Rhea Silvia in order to thwart him. Moreover, he accuses them of being Rhea Silvia's accomplices.

And summoning his brother to the council, he [Amulius] not only announced the deflowering of the girl, of which the rest knew naught, but even accused her parents of being her accomplices; and he ordered Numitor not to hide the guilty man, but to expose him.⁹⁵

Basing his claim from what his wife tells him about their daughter's story, however, Numitor insists that Mars is the father and that the children will be twins and heroes. The king's council believes his story because Rhea Silvia does deliver twins. However, Amulius believes that trickery is involved. He suspects that another baby was brought in to pose as one of the twins.

While this was taking place, those who had been appointed to keep guard over Ilia at the time of her delivery came to announce that she had given birth to twin males. And at once Numitor began to urge at length the same arguments, showing the deed to be the work of the god and demanding that they take no unlawful action against his daughter, who was innocent of her condition. On the other hand, Amulius thought that even in connection with her delivery there had been some human trickery and that the women had provided another child, either unknown to the guards or with their

⁹⁴Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1938), I.LXXVI.4-I.LXXVII.3.

⁹⁵Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1938), I.LXXVIII.2.

connivance, and he said much more to the same purport.⁹⁶

The councillors wind up ruling in favor of Amulius and decide that the twins will be drowned and Rhea Silvia will be beaten and executed.⁹⁷

As readers can see, many different views concerning the story of Rhea Silvia were present in Livy's era. Livy, however, chooses to abbreviate his story in order to stay in keeping with his goal of uplifting morality. He cannot present Rhea Silvia breaking her sacred vow of virginity because his contemporary audience considered this highly immoral. Instead, Livy has to present Mars raping Rhea Silvia even though he himself wavers on the story. Since other ancient writers do not necessarily have Livy's moral agenda for their writings, they may have added details pertaining to Rhea Silvia's story that were part of the historical tradition. If this is true, then Rhea Silvia certainly was considered an actor in her own right by the Romans because, according to Roman oral history, she might have had the gift of prophecy, might have chosen to bear her children, and might have purposefully become pregnant in order to thwart her uncle.

Conclusion

Like Rhea Silvia, the Sabine women, Hersilia, and Lucretia all are actors in their own rights despite their varied victimizations. Through the power of speech, they make independent actions that result in changing the face of Rome for the better. Furthermore, they give "power to" to their communities by influencing others, in turn, working within their communities and strengthening them. Moreover, by giving "power to" to their communities, Livy's victimized women overcome their suppressions by the men who wield "power over" over them.

In the first book of Livy's history, issues of "power to" and "power over" are applicable when looking at the powerful speeches of these women. Early in this first book, Rhea Silvia overcomes the victimization of her uncle preventing her bearing children by enrolling her as a Vestal Virgin and the alleged victimization of Mars raping her. Livy characterizes her as giving

⁹⁶Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1938), I.LXXVIII.4-5.

⁹⁷Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1938), I.LXXVI.3-I.LXXVIII.5.

“power to” to her community by naming Mars as the father of her children, for he uses the Latin word *nuncupat*.⁹⁸ This speech act of attributing the parentage of Mars to Romulus and Remus is important to the future of Rome for two reasons. It enables Romulus and, by extension, his descendants the Romans to claim the lofty descent from a god, and it breaks Rhea Silvia free from her suppression at the hands of the men who had “power over” over her. Likewise, the Sabine women give “power to” to their community through the power of speech, overcoming their violation by the men who had “power over” over them. By the use of speech, Livy characterizes them working together as a community and by speaking as a group in order to persuade their fathers and husbands to make peace. This gives “power to” to their community by serving as the impetus for peace. By speaking, they additionally overcome their troubled situations in which the Romans had “power over” over them through abduction. Not only do the Sabine women make this critical speech, but they also become the first mothers who would instill proper Roman values in their sons, the future citizens. In the same narrative, Hersilia, who may or may not have been an abducted woman in Livy’s account, enables the Sabine women to push for peace. Livy empowers her by characterizing her as the queen who can persuade Romulus to pardon the parents of the abducted women. She gives “power to” to her community by effectively persuading Romulus, and this results in the parents and kinsmen of the women from Crustumium settling in Rome and the Romans themselves settling in Crustumium. In addition to Rhea Silvia and the Sabine women including Hersilia, by the power of speech, Lucretia overcomes her victimization by Sextus Tarquinius wielding “power over” over her through the act of rape. Livy characterizes her spurring her kinsmen to revenge her rape through speech. Her speech and suicide serve as the catalyst that drives her kinsmen to oust the Tarquins from power and to establish the Roman Republic. Moreover, she gives “power to” to her community through her suicide by serving as a precedent for would-be adulterous women.

Even though Livy’s victimized women overcome their struggles through the power of

⁹⁸Livy, I.IV.3.

speech, they contrast with Verginia, the epitome of a victim, who does not speak throughout Livy's entire narrative. Since Verginia is only a maiden, her father has the legal right to speak on her behalf; therefore, Livy characterizes her as a proper child. The Sabine women including Hersilia and Lucretia, however, are matrons and speak to their husbands and fathers so that they may influence them to work for the good of Rome. Rhea Silvia's narrative is strikingly different since it has the mythical quality of including the god Mars and has Livy's ambiguous language. Despite the problems with Rhea Silvia's account, Livy still characterizes her as an actor in her own right, contrasting her with Verginia, because she acts independently by naming Mars as the father of her children.

Although Livy attributes the power of speech to Rhea Silvia, her account requires more analysis. By examining other accounts written by ancient historians other than Livy, a reader can learn that different views about her story existed during Livy's time. In particular, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who used the same sources as Livy, creates a more detailed narrative in which Amulius believes that Rhea Silvia and her parents conspired to get her pregnant in order to thwart him. In addition, Tibullus, a love poet, characterizes Rhea Silvia as giving herself in willing embraces to Mars. Given the varying depictions of Rhea Silvia, Livy's ambiguous language begins to make more sense. He may not be completely comfortable with the story himself; therefore, he gives suggestions as to whom the father of Rhea Silvia's children is.

Since his victimized women appear before all major Roman developments, Livy characterizes them as proper moral *exempla* for his contemporary audience. Throughout the first three books of Livy's history, women figure quite prominently in the formation of Rome. The victimization of women occurs before each of Rome's major political developments. This is initially surprising because one would think that a woman's victimization would not be involved in political change. Why does Livy characterize so many women, especially raped women, in his stories when his female audience surely would not have figured so prominently in their own time? Joshel, who is surprised at the attention Livy gives to his female characters, states:

Although the basic elements of Rome's early legends were present in Livy's sources, he could have dispensed with the tales in abbreviated fashion or minimized the role of women in stories of political change. Instead, he carefully constructs tragedies, drawing on all the literary techniques and models so meticulously noted by scholars. Why *this* writing of Roman history in Livy's present?⁹⁹

Even though Livy could have diminished the roles of women in his history, recounting the lives of women in Rome's early history is an essential part of Livy's presentation of moral paradigms. Livy writes in this way in order to set a moral ideal that both genders of his time must follow. By writing about honorable women such as Lucretia, Livy sets his own *exempla* for the proper actions of women. Livy presents these women as acting according to their own decisions, with the exception of Verginia, demonstrating that women must choose for themselves the moral high ground they ought to take. He describes the actions of women who greatly contribute to the foundation of Rome in order to harken back to a time in which Roman morality seems to be of greater quality. Since the contributions of these women are significant, Livy's contemporary female audience could find moral female heroes. Even rape victims can contribute to the greater good of society because they can overcome their victimization to benefit Rome.

Claussen, however, mistakenly argues that Livy ceases including the contributions of women to Rome. She says that, after book five, Livy halts including female characters in his narratives,

Livy's earliest written sources, so he tells us, date from after the sack of Rome by the Gauls in 390 B.C. (*a.u.c.* 6.2). For events before that time he was relying on traditional, even mythical, material.... Why does Livy in his later books cease presenting his readership with stories about women? A simple answer may present itself: that when he had more formal political and historical sources to inform him, he did not need to flesh out his narrative with domestic tales. A corollary to this would be the assumption that these traditional tales in the early books were acceptable to his readership as an alternative to the more overtly political (and therefore masculine) history that he could cull from written sources.¹⁰⁰

Although no thoroughly factual historical sources were available to Livy for his early history of Rome, forcing him to rely on myths, he does continue to include women in his narratives after book five. Women did figure prominently into Roman myths and other oral traditions, and Livy made choices to include those stories which would contribute to his moral agenda. His

⁹⁹Joshel, 117.

¹⁰⁰Claussen, 73, 78. I have kept Claussen's words as they are.

readership would have found models of morality in many of his books, including models of behavior for women who seemingly were victims. Although Livy's presentations of morality as paradigms may be difficult for modern readers, Livy's narratives still stand as an important source. They show the way in which his contemporary audience viewed morality.

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