

As part of my course on Gender and Sexuality in the Ancient World, taught under the auspices of the History Department at Rutgers-Newark in the Spring 2009 semester, I devoted a class session to discussing rape in Latin poetry. The assigned readings were two stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* – the rape of Proserpine and the story of Tereus, Procne and Philomela.

This paper hopes to open discussion on two specific issues – first, how to deal with issues of teaching rape effectively in a single session; second, how to teach rape to a diverse student classroom. Rutgers-Newark, part of the state university of New Jersey, has been declared the most diverse national university in the United States for the twelfth consecutive year. My students represent a wide range of different races, religions and cultural backgrounds; the different values and expectations that they hold may clash when approaching these texts. Many of them also come from Newark, historically one of the most violent cities in New Jersey. My paper will report how the varied experiences and backgrounds of my students informed their reading of Ovid's rapes, which I hope will be helpful to other educators in less diverse academic settings.

As part of a course-long assessment strategy, students were asked to read primary texts and post responses to questions provided on the course Blackboard site. They also had to respond to another student's answers. As the response on the Ovid rape texts was the eighth in a series of ten, students had become comfortable with using the technology and challenging each other's opinions. The prompt questions for this class session, partially generated by the 2009 Teaching Rape Round Table, were "What motivates Pluto and Tereus? What are the differences between the two rapes? Is there a difference between what Ovid writes and what Ovid thinks?" These questions prepared the ground for a class discussion in a safe space, giving students the opportunity to think through and share some of the issues they encountered in the text before class met.

After reminding students that I expected them to engage in discussion respectfully and maturely, I began the class with a buzz group asking students to share with their neighbour how they felt their own background and history informed their reactions to Ovid. This connected the text to their own experience, but did not shut down discussion by asking them to share potentially sensitive material with the whole class. It also began to capitalise on the diversity of the classroom by making students explicitly aware of the alternative perspectives of their peers. I then asked students to define rape, in the context of deciding whether Proserpine is raped or not; the ambiguity of Ovid's description provides the space to explore our own definitions of rape. The discussion then covered questions of agency, such as why Tereus acted as he did and whether Philomela could have resisted, as well as any issues the students raised in their Blackboard responses or in class discussion. The paper will close with a consideration of how successful these techniques were in creating an awareness and willingness to engage with the topic meaningfully, and the consequences of this session for the remainder of the semester.