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"If You Are Men": Erotic and Political Violence in Livy's Foundation Myths

This paper analyzes the conflation of erotic and political violence in Livy's foundation narratives. As scholars (Joplin 1990, Joshel 1992) have noted, in these tales the female body is a metonym for the body politic. The symbolic violence that the tyrants inflict on the Roman people is made literal through the physical violation of Woman; the female body serves as a text upon which the social ills of the state are inscribed. Disorder on the political and moral level (i.e., greed, cruelty, and insolence on the part of the tyrants) is translated into, and given expression as, a crisis on the sexual level (i.e., rape of the female).

Moreover, in these stories rape is a vehicle for articulating and attempting to assuage a crisis in masculinity. Within a monarchy, Roman elite males are disempowered and feminized by a tyrannical figure. Their status as men and citizens is cast into doubt, evidenced even in the vocabulary used to describe them. In Livy's account of the Lucretia story, Collatinus and the other males are repeatedly called *iuvenes* rather than *viri* (cf. 1.57.6, 57.7, 57.10, 57.11). What facilitates the transition from *iuvenes* to *viri*, from monarchy to liberty, is the rape and death of Lucretia. Rape serves as a catalyst for homosocial bonds and initiates a Republican masculinity in which all elite Roman men are united by ties of fraternity and equality. Livy's account of Lucretia's rape, suicide, and its aftermath writes large this dynamic. Brutus pulls out the sword "dripping with blood" from Lucretia's body and passes it from Collatinus to Lucretius to Valerius; female blood provides the basis for a ritual bonding between the men and is the material for the restoration of masculinity. As Lucretia's raped corpse is displayed in the Forum, a new political order is literally founded over her dead body. Woman as spectacle helps to constitute male and civic identity and inaugurate a political community of Roman citizens.

The specter of failed masculinity, however, is never fully banished. Since masculinity in the ancient world was an unstable and precarious construct (cf. Gleason 1995, Foxhall and Salmon 1998, Williams 1999), it necessitated continuous reiteration. Thus, in the first pentad of Livy's History the pattern of the violation of the female body as catalyst for the creation of a new political structure is played out four times (Ilia, the Sabine women, Lucretia, and Verginia). This theme of male political and social displacement had a particular resonance in Livy's own time. Given the political and social upheavals in the late Republic, the period was marked by a crisis in elite Roman male subjectivity. As the usual institutionalized avenues for both channeling and displaying masculine and civic virtue became problematic and power became concentrated in the hands of a few and then only one, notions of what it meant to be a Roman *vir* and a Roman citizen became contested. Livy's text is one of the places where we see these insecurities being played out. This process of making and remaking men and citizens is one that continues well into the first century CE.