

The Rape of Lucretia and the Founding of Republics: Readings in Livy, Machiavelli, and Rousseau

Melissa Matthes

The bonds among republican citizens are created, in part, through the stories told and retold as the foundational myths of the republic. In this book, Melissa Matthes takes advantage of the way in which republican theorists in different eras—Livy, Machiavelli, and Rousseau—retell the story of the rape of Lucretia to support their own conceptions of republicanism.

The recurring presentation of this story as theater by these different theorists reveals not only the performative elements of republicanism but, as Matthes argues, adds to Hannah Arendt's emphasis on the oral dimensions of speech and hearing the important idea of public space as a visual field.

Lucretia's story also helps illuminate the gendering of republicanism, particularly the aspects of violence and subordination that lie at its very origin. By focusing attention on this underlying and deeply gendered quality of republics, Matthes brings republican theory into fruitful dialogue with feminism.

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