

## Rape Glossed as Robbery: Avoiding or Addressing Difficult Topics in Introductory Latin

Introductory Latin texts include cultural information either outright or through vocabulary and reading selections. Some aspects of Roman culture are difficult to address from current perspectives. This paper attempts to provide a survey of which topics are most likely to appear in an introductory textbook and why they might be difficult for teachers (using the text at any level) to avoid or approach responsibly. I assert that these issues are much more ingrained in introductory texts than most expect and are often problematically represented.

Questions about the goal of teaching Latin naturally arise when considering what content to include in a course. Furthermore, the idea of such things as difficult topics cannot help but interact with larger cultural debates including the use of trigger warnings and political correctness. While these larger discussions provide important background, this paper focuses on the specific needs of an inexperienced teacher who has been assigned an introductory course and whose syllabus will likely consist entirely of some particular introductory textbook. Thus, they are only treated briefly.

In a seminar course on reading Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, a commonly cited scenario when discussing teaching uncomfortable topics (James, 2014), the difficult themes of the text will have been made clear by previous scholars and commentators. Fellow instructors, like James (2014), offer advice about how to structure the course with these themes in mind, how to prepare students, plan discussion, and frame it within a campus culture. In contrast, looking for scholarship on an introductory Latin textbook is more likely to find reviews discussing its methodology or breakdown of the grammar. Perhaps a short list of the cultural content will be included if the book segments itself in that fashion, but warnings for controversial material are unlikely.

This paper's title is drawn from the textbook *Latin via Ovid: A First Course* (Goldman, 1982). In the fifth chapter, when giving vocabulary, the word '*rapina, -ae, f.*' is provided with the gloss "carrying off, robbery". In the accompanying reading, it appears: "*Nymphae... maxime amabant fabulam longam de rapina Europae a Iove.*" The text also promotes a deductive method, where the reading is first attempted without vocabulary assistance. Thus, the likelihood that some student will use contextual and cognate clues to deduce a less euphemistically literal meaning is high. How might the instructor react? The story of Europa and the Bull also appears in a common companion text (Groton, 1995) to the classic *Wheelock's Latin* (Wheelock, 2011). Another Wheelock's companion (Blondell, 1993) provides a play for students to act out starring a Roman prostitute and her pimp. Stories such as these could bring up complex conversations regarding sex in the Roman world. How appropriate is such a conversation in the introductory Latin classroom? Another common text, the *Cambridge Latin Course* (Pope, 2001), structures its first unit around the story of Pompeii and Herculaneum. While the destruction and rediscovery of these towns fascinates almost anyone and provides extraordinary context for learning the language, it might be difficult or, conversely, irresponsible to avoid addressing the terrible suffering of their people at the moment of eruption. How open should an instructor be to inviting such tension into her classroom? The textbook also bases the majority of its content around the life of one particular inhabitant of Pompeii: Caecilius, who counted slave-trader among his professions. The theme of slavery or at least the vocabulary words '*servus*' and '*dominus*' seems almost omnipresent in introductory Latin texts. Can a teacher assume her students will translate these words without question or should she supplement the textbook somehow? While this paper cannot provide a definitive answer to these questions, it does attempt to serve as a guide to the kinds of issues an instructor is likely to encounter in introductory

textbooks and why an instructor might need to prepare for them just as carefully as they prepare a lesson on grammar.

### Bibliography

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