

Student 3: Low Merit

As a *nupta pudica* (Ovid, *Fasti* 2 794) “good and faithful wife” Roman women were expected to behave in certain ways. They had to be faithful to their husbands, loyal to their families and promote their husband’s interests. The ideal woman expected to look after household affairs and organise the slaves. She would educate her children until it was time for her to select some form of higher education for them and when they came of age she would select a husband or wife that would be an asset to the family. (1) From Ovid we learn of this ideal woman, from his writings on Lucretia. Lucretia was seen by society as the perfect woman. She was what all women strived to be and what all men longed for. What made Lucretia special was her death: after being raped she committed suicide because she had lost her chastity and did not want to shame her husband. (2) *Tum quoque iam moriens ne non procumbit honeste respicit.* (Ovid, *Fasti* 2 833-834). She made sure she collapsed in a seemly fashion, while dying she took this care.” This was an important quality for Roman wives to have. An honest and sincere personality, to be loyal and dignified to the end and faithful to their husbands. (3)

Lucretia was perfect in another way. She was very attractive by Roman standards. *Forma placet niveusque color flavique capilli quique aderat nulla factus ab arte decor.* (*Fasti* 2, 763-764). Her appearance pleased him and her white skin and fair hair and the beauty which she possessed which came from no art.” (4) Tibullus says to Delia “Simple as you are with long hair dishevelled and with bare feet.” We can deduce that Roman society or at least Roman men valued natural beauty. (5) It is thanks to accounts like this that we are able to understand what was considered attractive.

Being “*fortem castumque*” (*Fasti* 2. 765) also showed men that you had courage which was an important quality for Roman women to have. Our model of the ideal Roman woman is Lucretia after she committed suicide to keep her virtue. (6) Tibullus also wants Delia to be brave. “You must do and dare, for Venus helps the brave.” (7) Roman society put many things down to the gods so if being brave got the gods on your side then it must be a good quality for Roman women to have.

Virtue was imperative for a Roman woman no matter her social status. Tibullus wrote about Delia bringing up her daughter “Teach her at least to be chaste even if a ribbon does not tie and hold back her hair nor a long dress restrict her feet.” Ovid says *et quod corrumpere non est* (*Fasti* 2 841) “and because she could not be seduced”. (8) Even though women might not be perfect examples of chastity it was still important for them to be seen as such.