"BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL":

TARPEIA AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE FEMININE

Propertius 4.4 retells as a love story how the Vestal Virgin Tarpeia betrayed Rome to the Sabines. As in other versions of the tale, she bargains with Rome’s enemy and leads them into the Capitoline citadel by an unsuspected path; the Sabine king, Tatius, rewards her by having his soldiers crush her to death beneath their shields. But Propertius uniquely attributes her treason to passionate love for Tatius: his version shows her bargaining to be Tatius’ lover and queen, not for gold, as more cynical authors have it.¹ How to interpret this elegy’s revision of a founding Roman myth has puzzled numerous commentators, who commonly throw all questions onto the axis of Augustan politics. Propertius’ announcement, in his fourth book of elegies (4.1.57, 67–70), of a prevailing interest in aetiological elegy appears to support that tactic, since book 4’s aetiologies reflect upon Roman history and thus assess the mos maiorum toward which Augustus pushes contemporary Rome. Accordingly, some see the Tarpeia poem as evidence of the poet’s tardy sympathy with Augustus’ program: Propertius allegedly repudiates pure love elegy as inimical to Augustus’ moral and political reforms and condemns Tarpeia to prove he has rejected his old elegiac sympathies.² Yet others detect irony beneath his patriotism, proclaiming his “Augustan” moral severity but a thin veneer, donned for protection from an increasingly intolerant regime: Propertius reveals his still warm elegiac loyalty, they say, when he converts a tale of Tarpeia’s greed into a chronicle of her star-crossed love for the Sabine king.³

¹ Z. Gansniece’s Tarpeia: The Making of a Myth (Wratislavia 1949) offers a useful conspectus both of the ancient evidence for, and previous scholarship on, the legend of Tarpeia—though, rather surprisingly, she dismisses Propertius’ version from consideration in a contemptuous footnote (22, n.53).


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But the very fact that the poem’s ambiguities lend themselves to such divergent interpretations by learned and careful scholars suggests that the wrong questions have been asked, questions both too narrowly confined within the circumference of Augustan politics and too focused upon “either/or” answers. This essay argues that elegy 4.4 interrogates the very binary logic implied in framing its loyalties as either “pro-Augustan” or “anti-Augustan,” and that one of philosophy’s most brilliant contemporary thinkers, Luce Irigaray, can help us elucidate the elegy’s equivocal stratagems. Her work confronts contemporary thought with the problematic elements of a consistently unacknowledged symbolization system that does not cleanly divide into binary oppositions—a system she calls “feminine” insofar as culture has traditionally assigned the messier ambiguities of thought to Woman as a force of disruption and disorder. Guided principally by her critique of conventional epistemology, I shall show that the Tarpeia poem abounds in details that cannot be captured in “either/or” logic—details linked (noncoincidentally) to feminine desire.

Take, for example, the fatal body of water that initially brings together Tarpeia and Tatius. The paths of Sabine king and Vestal Virgin cross at a shepherd’s spring where Tatius palisades for his military camp; Tarpeia sees him when she draws water from the spring and falls passionately in love. But how she can draw water despite Tatius’ barricade has baffled commentators. Emendations and line transpositions have been freely offered to try to bring these puzzling verses into sensible coordination. Some scholars make two springs from one,5 or banish one of the irreconcilable allusions to the fons;6 others poke holes in the barrier;7 still others try a combination of


approaches. Yet each suggested change to the text garners trenchant objections and small assent. The spring’s inconvenience to smooth explanation is striking: both carefully guarded and easily available to an unarmed enemy girl, it cuts across the very conceptual categories that seek to define it. The spring deconstructs such oppositions as enemy territory/native territory; inside/outside; martial/pastoral; closed/open. Tarpeia’s act of daily devotion to Vesta marks this mysterious fount as intractable to conventional logic; we can locate it neither entirely within, nor entirely without, Tatius’ barricade.

Moreover, as the work of F. E. Brenk and John Warden makes clear, water is the poem’s central point of reference throughout. Stunned by Tatius’ good looks, Tarpeia drops her ritual water jar when she first sees him (21–22); she invents ritual excuses to visit the sacred spring so that she can spy on her beloved (22–23); she worries that her tears of amorous frustration may have quenched the perpetual flame on Vesta’s altar (45–46). The elegy’s liquid imagery measures Tarpeia’s desire for Tatius as a passion that exceeds all “proper” bounds. But why water—why does that element in particular govern this poem (rather than, say, the commoner erotic metaphors of fire or heat)?

Luce Irigaray’s essay “The Mechanics of Fluids” can illuminate the water imagery that organizes this poem’s resistant ambiguities; her thought also sheds light on why the heart of the elegy takes shape in Tarpeia’s own words, a long soliloquy that mimes desire articulated from a “feminine” vantage point. Irigaray assesses conventional epistemology as (mis)informed by an exclusionary model of understanding—a model that grapples with the welter of phenomena by calling upon binary opposition to establish distinctive classes. Such a model takes “black” to be the opposite and exclusion of “white,” for example, as “male” of “female,” “rational” of “irrational,” “good” of “bad.” Each term is logically impenetrable to the other, as if founded upon a metaphorical “mechanics of solids.” Moreover, the meaning produced by such binarisms is never neutral: one term is always posited as inferior and supplementary to the other, as “female” commonly is to “male.” Various types of poststructuralism have demonstrated the falsity of this construction by showing the putative “superior” term to operate according to principles embodied in the “inferior, supplementary” term, which is thus transformed.

Yet Irigaray goes beyond demonstrating “bad faith” to show the putative “knowledge” produced by these binarisms to be implicitly gendered male. Her assumption should be familiar territory to classi-

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cists; Genevieve Lloyd has shown that the Pythagoreans offered an early example of it. Their famous table of opposites construes the "bounded"—that which can be grasped by the rational subject as precise and clearly determined—as male and good. The female and bad align with the "unbounded"—the unlimited, irregular, and disorderly.11

In contrast to this tradition, Irigaray seeks out a "feminine" logic that escapes the conceptual tyranny of stable forms and that offers a new metaphorical basis for thinking—a logic analogous to the "mechanics of fluids." Fluids "resist" in that they refuse to be reduced to mathematical formulae, like the more biddable nature of solids. Fluids challenge the idea that dividing the world into clean oppositions ("either x or not-x") adequately expresses some underlying truth.12

The metaphoric logic behind Irigaray's quest would have been familiar not only to the Pythagoreans, but to Romans near Propertius' own time. Sandra Joshel and Catharine Edwards have recently documented the extent to which Rome characterized the rejected, inferior, and untrue as liquid and feminine, while ascribing hardness, dryness, fixity, and masculinity to "the good." Sallust, Horace, Seneca, and others speak of vice in images of insidious floods that wash away both personal virtue and the social order, deluges that soften and effeminize Roman moral rigor.13 Joshel and Edwards concern themselves chiefly with ethical discourse. But set in the wider context of Roman moral philosophy, the trajectory of their thought intersects


12 Here and in the previous paragraph, I have summarized the ideas of Irigaray's "The Mechanics of Fluids" in This Sex Which Is Not One (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985) 106–18, but The Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche (New York 1991) takes up these musings again and expands on them. The best guide to Irigaray's thought on these and other matters remains M. Whitford's Luce Irigaray: Philosophy in the Feminine (London 1991).


Support for the idea that greater liquidity, weakness, deviance, and propensity for irrationality characterized the feminine was also available to Romans from a "scientific" quarter, i.e., from medicine. H. von Staden and M. Green have both demonstrated, for example, that Celsus inherits the prevalent Greek conceptualization of women, attested throughout the Hippocratic corpus' gynecological writings: women are wetter than men, and their health (including their mental health) depends upon the proper management of their bodily fluids (H. von Staden, "Apud nos foediora verba: Celsus' Reluctant Construction of the Female Body," in Le Latin médical: La constitution d'un langage scientifique. Réalités et langage de la médecine dans le monde roman, ed. G. Sabbah [Saint-Étienne 1991], 271–96; M. Green, "The Transmission of Ancient Theories of Female Physiology and Disease through the Early Middle Ages" [Ph.D. diss., Princeton, 1985]). For an overview of Greek gynecological beliefs, see H. King, "Bound to Bleed: Artemis and Greek Women," Images of Women in Antiquity, ed. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt (Detroit 1983) 109–27, A. E. Hanson, "The Medical Writer's Woman," Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World, ed. D. Halperin, J. Winkler, and F. Zelting (Princeton 1990) 309–37, and "Conception, Gestation, and the Origin of Female Nature in the Corpus Hippocraticum," Helios 19 (1992) 31–71.
epistemology itself. Cicero, for example, treats "the good" as virtually synonymous with "the real," with "being" as opposed to "seeming," as in the Platonic and Stoic traditions he inherits. The truth the vicious person fails to see resembles the Platonic Forms—solid, stable, measurable. Cicero also plays upon the etymological connection between *virtus* and *vir*, depicting moral truth as something solid and masculine in the midst of feminine flux; his philosophy can justly be described as a masculinist "mechanics of solids."

These associative links among untruth-as-vice, the feminine and liquidity—as opposed to truth-as-virtue, the masculine and solidity—clarify some of the recalcitrant details of the Tarpeia elegy. Yet the poem does not simply reproduce Roman conceptions of "masculine" vs. "feminine" properties. Rather, Propertius questions Rome's cultural prejudices by revealing the hasty sutures in logic that support them. When he unfolds Tarpeia's story and grants her a voice, he sketches an epistemology much closer to the beliefs of Heraclitus, for example, or to the Skeptic philosopher Carneades (whose visit to Rome so deeply impressed its citizens in the century before Propertius' own).15

14 On truth as solid and stable, see, e.g., *Tusc.* 2.21.48 (the part of the soul devoid of reason is *mollis*), 4 passim, esp. 4.5.10—6.11 (*placida quietaque constantia* characterizes the rational soul), 4.10.23 (by contrast, corrupt beliefs are like liquid effusions of bad blood or an overflow of phlegm or bile), 4.13.31 (the essence of virtue is consistency of beliefs and judgments characterized by firmness and stability *fanimo opinionum judiciorumque aequabilitas et constantia cum firmitate quadam et stabilitate*). On truth as measurable, see, e.g., *Off.* 1.59 (ethical duty can be calculated, like a problem in accounting), 3 passim, (which focuses entirely on comparing two goods in order to distinguish the true from the apparent good; 3.3.11, for example, describes measuring one good against another as like comparing weights in a balance scale).

15 *Tusc.* 2.18.43.

I am not the first to view Propertius' representations of female subjectivity as unsettling received modes of thought, especially in the moments when he assumes feminine personae. More than twenty years ago, J. Hallett saw in the Propertian lover-narrator's donning of feminine characteristics and of female personae the quintessence of the "counter-cultural feminism" she detected in ancient elegy in general ("The Role of Women in Roman Elegy: Counter-Cultural Feminism," *Arethusa* 6 [1973] 103—24). More recently, both B. Gold and M. Wyke have written extensively on what Propertius' literary "transvestism" implies, arguing that it forms a significant exception to elegy's general character as an "obstinately male genre" insofar as it challenges the gendered hierarchies that dominate Roman thought (Gold, "'But Ariadne Was Never There in the First Place': Finding the Female in Roman Poetry," in *Feminist Theory and the Classics*, ed. N. S. Rabinowitz and A. Richlin [New York 1993] 75—101; Wyke, "Taking the Woman's Part: Engendering Roman Love Elegy," *Ramus* 23 [1994] 110—28. Wyke, more cautious than Gold, reads this disruptive potential only in Propertius' fourth book of elegies, where the voices of female personae extensively displace that of the male lover-narrator who controlled Propertius' first three books. Her other articles on elegy reveal a less sanguine view of Propertius I–III.

Clearly, I subscribe to a version of this view when I interpret Propertius' representation of Tarpeia, for reasons that I hope this essay makes clear: too many details of the poem work to subvert Roman ideologies of gender for their unsettling effect to be mere accident rather than principled textual strategy. (For guidance on the matter of the Roman male poets' representation of female subjectivity, I am indebted to my learned friend, Dr. E. Spentzou.)
Both these thinkers deny that philosophy elucidates a truth conceived as the fixed substrate beneath phenomena in flux. Both challenge the idea that the universe naturally divides into fixed and stable binarisms; for neither one is philosophy the grasping of stable forms.17 Taken to its logical conclusion, this alternate frame of reference not only undermines the hierarchy that raises Man over Woman, but denies that such dichotomies order existence in any meaningful way.

With this philosophical background in mind, let us turn to the poem’s opening and consider the uneasy montage of disjunctive images that shuffles before the reader’s eyes:

Tarpeium nemus et Tarpeiae turpe sepulcrum
fabor et antiqui limina capta Iovis.
lucus erat felix hederoso conditus antro,
mutaque nativis obstrepit arbor aquis,
Silvani ramosa domus, quo dulcis ab aestival
fistula poturae ire iubebat ovis.
hunc Tatius fontem vallo praecingit acerno,
fidaque suggesta castra coronat humo. (1–8)
I shall speak of the Tarpeian grove and the sordid tomb of Tarpeia and the captured threshold of ancient Jove. There was a fertile grove enclosed in an ivy-covered dell, and many a tree murmurs in reply to nature’s waters—the branchy home of Silvanus, to which the sweet shepherd’s pipe bade the sheep withdraw from the heat and drink. This spring Tatius bounds with a maple palisade, and encircles his loyal camp with piled-up earth.

We are offered the queer juxtaposition of a grove, a tomb, and a hostage’s threshold, along with the mysterious Tarpeium nemus. Many reasonably find this last element especially disturbing, insofar

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17 For Heraclitus’ views on change, see the fragments collected and discussed by G. S. Kirk and J. E. Raven, The Presocratic Philosophers (Cambridge 1957) esp. 196–202. Though assessing Heraclitus’ cosmology on the basis of our scanty fragments is a matter of controversy, the ancients themselves certainly believed that his views denied a stable substrate to phenomena: see Plato, Crat. 401d, Tht. 160d, 179c–180b; Aristotle, de An. 405a25, Metaph. 987a33, 1005b25. Indeed, Heraclitus’ conviction that binary opposition is an illusion drives Aristotle to distraction: Aristotle returns repeatedly to this doctrine, trying to refute it (see Top. 159b30, Ph. 185b20, Metaph. 1010a13, 1012a24, 1012a34, 1062a32, 1063b25). See also H. Cherniss, *Aristotle’s Criticism of Presocratic Philosophy* (Baltimore 1935) esp. 380–82; G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments* (Cambridge 1954), offers a bolder—and to my mind more convincing—interpretation of the fragments than that found in Kirk and Raven (1957); W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Vol. I: The Earlier Presocratics and the Pythagoreans (Cambridge 1962) 435–69 (whose notes usefully summarize previous bibliography); C. Kahn’s *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* (Cambridge 1979) is also a useful companion to the fragments (though I believe him mistaken in interpreting the crucial fr. D90 as a record of Heraclitus’ belief in periodic cosmic conflagration). As for Carneades’ views: Cicero, in *De Re Publica*, has “Philus” painstakingly summarize a speech Carneades is said to have made defending ethical relativism (*Rep. 3.8–31*). Although “Laelius” refutes the argument, it must have seemed a formidable threat to merit the considerable trouble Cicero takes to both redact and refute it.
as Propertius introduces and drops it with equally little ceremony, even though his aetiological program should compel the poet to trace its history; moreover, no other source attests its existence. Accordingly, some adopt Kraffert's emendation to sceius, while others assimilate the nemus to the lucus in line 3—though that helps little, given that neither does the lucus inspire an action: it just colorfully shades the background. The question of what these and the other prominently placed elements of the ekphrasis have to do with one another—how we might reconcile the elements of a peaceful pastoral scene (grove, spring, sheep, shepherd's pipe) with a tomb, or, more strangely still, with the martial elements picked out by "Jove's captured threshold," Tatius palisading the spring and arraying his army around it—Propertius leaves unanswered. But the obscurity of the opening ekphrasis dramatizes the role interpretation plays in what passes for perception. Ancient as well as modern analyses of perception recognize the way that convention inscribes and naturalizes interpretation in the visual artifact, so as to make a legible whole out of disparate objects. Stripped of such subtle framing, the opening lines, in their obstinate opacity, baffle any claim to the "pure" perception of truth, truth unmediated by representation; their apparent heterogeneity demands a new way of seeing the (previously) unimaginable. The rest of the poem elaborates upon that need for a different vantage.

In the next moment after this serenely pastoral opening strangely stained with martial and morbid elements, Tarpeia sees Tatius for the first time and the water jar slips from her nerveless fingers. Graeco-Roman art and legend lend her gesture sinister significance. Giulia Sissa has discussed the ways in which the ancients associated vessels, especially water vessels, with female sexuality. A woman's sexuality is a container for the precious resource of fertility, a container properly unbreakable. That metaphorical thinking shapes Roman folk legend when, for example, Tuccia the Vestal disproves the rumors of her unchastity by miraculously carrying water

18 W. A. Camps amends nemus to lucus outright (above, n.6, 21 and ad 4.4.1); Shackleton Bailey preserves the vulgate reading, but calls Kraffert's conjecture "tempting" (Propertiana [Cambridge 1956] 234). Among those who take nemus of 4.1 to be identical with the lucus of 4.3: Butler and Barber (above, n.8) 344; Wellesley (above, n.7) 96; J. L. Marr, (above, n.5) 170— R. King, "Creative Landscaping: Inspiration and Artifice in Propertius 4.4," CJ 85 (1990) 226.

19 Stahl remarks upon the conflict between martial and pastoral imagery (above, n.3) 281.


in a sieve.\textsuperscript{22} Being chaste, she can magically seal a container that should leak—but the Vestal Tarpeia, whose love has made her ritual chastity impossible for her, makes even an un perforated container spill its contents. Moreover, as Tarpeia drew this water to clean Vesta’s temple, the poet remarks that the jar “hurt her head” (\textit{at illi / urgetur medium fictilis})\textsuperscript{23} \textit{urna caput, 4.4.15–16}).\textsuperscript{24} That phrase eerily references another Propertian heroine: his idealized Roman matron Cornelia swears to her own chastity under threat of the pain the Danaids suffer by using a similar phrase. “If I lie,” she says, “may that barren water jar, the punishment of the sisters, hurt my shoulders” (\textit{si fallo, poena sororum / infelix umeros urgetur urna meos, 4.11.27–28}). Sissa has shown that the Danaids’ unfillable sieves represent their flawed sexuality, failed as maidens and failed as brides.\textsuperscript{25} Propertius’ elaborate cross-referencing between his two elegies casts the shadow of those sieves upon Tarpeia’s oozy, burdensome water jar.

Yet the symbol of these murderous brides does not unambiguously condemn Tarpeia: Propertius writes her story as both the same and significantly different. True, Tarpeia expects to be Tatius’ bride: she says, for example, “Rome betrayed comes to you as no insignificant dowry” (“\textit{dos tibi non humilis prodita Roma venit},” 4.4.56). Tatius’ last words to her echo this expectation when he says, “Marry, and ascend the bed of my kingdom!” (“\textit{nube ait, ‘et regni scande cubile mei’},” 4.4.90). But in contrast to the Danaid myth, the “bride-groom” kills the “bride”: the Capitoline that Tatius mockingly calls his “marriage bed” sees \textit{his} murderous duplicity, not hers. And though scrupulous to punish her, Tatius happily keeps the fruit of her treachery: Rome. Tatius lies and deceives—the very acts supposed to define women, especially in sexual affairs.\textsuperscript{26} The poem proffers this, \textit{a l’air naïf}, as the benchmark of his honor: he dupes Tarpeia and thus “not even as an enemy gave honor to crime” (\textit{neque enim sceleri dedit hostis honorem, 4.4.89}). Yet this articulation ironically makes the “superior” term depend upon principles defined by the rejected, subordinate term: “masculine honor” becomes a subset of “feminine wiles.”

Even without the hypocrite Tatius as her foil, Tarpeia-as-flawed-vessel embodies a principle strangely necessary to Rome’s welfare,

\textsuperscript{22} Sissa (above, n.21) 127–29, discusses Tuccia’s miracle as recorded in V. Max. 8.1.5 and D.H. 2.69.

\textsuperscript{23} P. A. Miller draws my attention to the fact that Propertius underlines the urn’s associations with innocence and purity—especially as these virtues traditionally accrue to early Rome—when he specifies its material as clay (\textit{fictilis}). Tibullus, for example, sees clay as the marker of the antique simplicity imbedded with virtue, a stark contrast to contemporary Rome’s hunger for luxury (Tib. 1.1.37–40).

\textsuperscript{24} Unless otherwise noted, I have used E. A. Barber, \textit{Sexii Propertii Carmina} (Oxford 1960), for all quotations and textual citations of Propertius.

\textsuperscript{25} Sissa (above, n.21) 127–34, 162–63, 171–72.

\textsuperscript{26} Instances of this calumny are too numerous in classical literature to list here, but as representative examples consider: Cat. 70; Hor. \textit{Odes} 2.8 and Nisbet and Hubbard’s (above, n.10) introductory note to that ode citing parallel examples of women forsworn in love; Prop. 2.16.47–8; Ovid, \textit{Am.} 3.3.
if little acknowledged; the breach she opens in Rome’s walls gives them a necessary elasticity. David Konstan has elucidated the way Roman historiography grapples with the contradictory effects of boundaries: boundaries define the polis,27 but they also limit its growth and expansion.28 Sandra Joshel and Patricia Joplin have, in turn, demonstrated the metaphorical alignment between physical and conceptual boundaries of the polis, and female sexuality: sexual unions, whether rapes, marriages, or seductions, regularly “breach” the polis’ defining limits so that it may move on to a new phase. Livy, for example, dramatically connects the ultimately fatal sexual assaults upon Lucretia and Verginia to the downfall of the Roman monarchy and of the decemviri’s tyranny respectively.29 Similarly, Tarpeia makes possible Rome as Propertius and his contemporaries know it. Pierre Grimal notes that the Caesars proudly traced their ancestry all the way back to the Sabine king, Tatius; the Sabines in general figure importantly in Roman history. Their stealthy entry into Rome sets the stage for eventually reconciling the two warring factions and, gradually, for Rome to absorb her former enemies completely.30 Tarpeia’s action is both abhorred and utterly necessary—the type of felix culpa that Roman legend regularly stages and that just as regularly demands the sacrifice of a woman.31

Tarpeia thus bears the unhappy burden of history: the resolution she proposes to Rome’s conflict with the Sabines foreshadows the principles of their eventual reconciliation.32 Tarpeia says that her

27 I use the word “polis” as modern philosophy employs it—to refer generally to an organized society, without regard to the specific historical forms such a society may assume.


30 See Grimal’s 1951 essay and 315–18 of his 1952 essay (both cited above, n.2).  

31 J. Rykwert, The Idea of a Town (Princeton 1976), notes that a quasi-apotheosized Tarpeia, albeit a traitor of legendary stature, received state sacrifice at the opening of the Parentalia, the Roman feast of All Souls. Such dubious heroines regularly figure in foundation stories; Tarpeia is to be identified, Rykwert declares, as “the virgin at the sacred hearth [by whose] guilty or substitute intercourse with god or hero, as well as its punishment, a new city, a new alliance, a new nation, a new state are founded” (160). G. Miles deftly uses Rykwert’s observations to explicate Tarpeia’s significance for the Roman conceptualization of marriage (“The First Roman Marriage and the Theft of the Sabine Women,” in Innovations of Antiquity, ed. R. Hexter and D. Selden [New York 1992] 183–84).

marriage will “dissolve” (solvēre, 59) the two established battlelines and “soften” (mollīet, 62) their arms (her metaphors of liquescence and plasticity are telling). Marriage does do so, but not hers to Tatius; rather, the Sabine women’s to Roman men.33 Yet her ironically prophetic scheme again shows the “dominant” term to depend upon principles established by the “subordinate, contingent” term: Rome’s integrity as a polis—what it means to be Rome—depends on the city’s infiltration by foreigners because of women. By this process, the poem not only transforms the subordinate term, so that Tarpeia’s betrayal becomes felix culpa, but questions the very logic that sees “integrity” and “infiltration” as antitheses.

One last watery image from this elaborate canvas: as Tarpeia rushes to find Tatius and offer him Rome, Propertius compares her to a Strymonian woman running alongside the river Thermodon. The Vestal “rushes headlong, just as a woman from Strymon, her breast bared by the torn fold of her dress, alongside the swift Thermodon” (illa ruit, qualis celerem prope Thermodonta / Strymonis abscesso pectus aperta sinu, 4.4.71–2). The cunning oddity of this image sketches a woman “out of place,” for whom no clear context can be found. John Warden elucidates the picture’s duplicity: mentioning the Thermodon suggests an Amazon and the woman’s nude breast corroborates this, given Graeco-Roman sculpture’s tradition of Amazons with one breast bared. But, as Warden points out, Amazons belted back their garments to expose the breast, rather than tearing them. Torn garment and headlong haste imply a Bacchant, especially since erotic passion drives Tarpeia; Latin literature often represents women’s love as inspiring Maenadlike behavior.34 Warden principally elucidates the parallels between Propertius’ Tarpeia and Vergil’s Dido, reading the Vestal as a response to the Sidonian queen. Warden’s fine exposition renders his point inescapable, yet some observations he prematurely subordinates to Dido’s image, and these deserve consideration in a fuller context.

For example, although he initially finds tension in the juxtaposition of Bacchant, so often a convenient figure for a woman passionately in love, and a traditionally “manhating” Amazon, he later observes:

As one gazes more steadily at the two figures, one begins to suspect that they are not as diametrically opposed as might appear at first sight. The pack of wild women who tore apart Orpheus and Pentheus might seem, at least to

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33 The principal Late Republican and Imperial accounts of the Sabine women’s abduction all report legitimate marriage to Roman men as the outcome; see Cicero, De Rep. 2.7; D. H. 2.30–1; Livy, 1.9.14–16, 13.1–5; Ovid, Fasti 3.202–28. For an ingenious analysis of the rape of the Sabines as represented in these and other ancient texts, see Miles (above, n.31).

34 J. Warden (above, n.9) 177–80 points to Vergil (Aen. 4.300–01) and Propertius himself (3.8.14) as examples of Latin writers who compare women in erotic distress to Bacchar⇒ P. A. Miller, “The Minotaur within: Fire, the Labyrinth, and Strategies of Containment in Aeneid 5 and 6,” CP 90 (1995) 227, aply cites Aen. 7.385–405 as another instance.
the threatened male, all too reminiscent of the women warriors of the Thermodon. In Warden marshals this duplicity to support reading Dido, the chaste warrior-queen turned impassioned lover, behind Tarpeia; yet, when seen in the context of Propertius' other references to Maenads and Amazons, the implications of 4.4's composite *sauvagesse* open out onto the intertwined problems of the feminine within and without the polis, and the inadequacy of thought to frame her.

Propertius' own sketches of Bacchants are few, but richly suggestive: in 3.22, Bacchants figure as savage manhunters, who define Greek "barbarity" as opposed to Roman decorum (however ironic the comparison may be). Italy may congratulate itself, he says, that here "savage Bacchants do not hunt Pentheus in the woods" (*Pentheus non saevae venantur in arbore Bacchae*, 3.22.23). In 1.3, Propertius compares his lover, insensibly slumbering and thus unresponsive to his attentions, to an exhausted Maenad wrapped in a sleep indifferent to man after communion with her god (*nec minus assiduis Edonis fessa choreis / qualis in herboso concidit Apidano*, 1.3.5–8). Cynthia is the sleeping Maenad of Greek vase paintings, and Propertius the satyr who spies upon her—but as on those vases, always in vain, as the object of the Maenad's sleeping inattention or waking rejection. Propertius represents Amazons with like ambiguity: Warden notes that the poet's women-warriors disquietingly juxtapose the eroticism of female nudity with weapons and belligerence.

When brought to bear upon the Tarpeia poem, these vignettes attest aspects of Woman's desire that escape Man's calculation: beside blind hatred or blind love for his sex arises a mystifying passion for war or for god, passion that places Man nearer margin than center of any epistemology—if he figures at all. In the light of these images, as well as of their wider cultural context, the Bacchant and Amazon evoked by Tarpeia in flight together sketch the extremes of Woman's figuration, but extremes that keep eerily collapsing into one another. Bacchant and Amazon share a passion for the divine, whether Ares, Artemis or Dionysos; they share a penchant for vio-

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35 (Above, n.9) 182.
36 Like the opening ekphrasis describing the places on the Capitoline relevant to Propertius' narrative—a picture in which martial elements oddly jostle serenely pastoral details—the allusions to Bacchants and Amazons and to their ambiguous relations to the polis that Propertius' Strymonian woman trails once again evoke the image of an ideologically significant space traversed by irreconcilable markers of violence and (erotic) concord.
37 See S. MacNally, "The Maenad in Early Greek Art," *Arethusa* 11 (1978) 121–24; F. Lissarague, "The Sexual Life of Satyrs," *Before Sexuality* (above, n.13) esp. 63–64. Literary sources also echo this theme of the Bacchant as inviolate, even—or especially—when most vulnerable in sleep; see Plutarch *Moralia* ("Mullerum Virtutes") 249e–f.
38 Warden (above, n.9) 179.
lence and a capacity to exceed the place marked out for Woman within the polis.\textsuperscript{40} They can be construed as opposites, given their reversed—though oddly symmetrical—relations to Man and the polis. Love-mad women behave like Maenads, and so inscribe the Bacchant as “manlover,” while the Amazon is “manhater” \textit{par excellence};\textsuperscript{41} the Bacchant originates within the polis and is drawn outside its confines, while the Amazon dwells at civilization’s borders, but is drawn into war with those at its heart.\textsuperscript{42} Yet Propertius’ juxtaposition emphasizes all the elements that overlap between their respective mythologies. This disturbing tendency of one figuration of Woman to collapse into another suggests some elemental miscalculation: if “manhater” and “manlover” are fundamentally so indistinguishable, if feminine margin and center of the polis exchange places so readily, are “Man” and “polis” meaningful reference points? Something in-calculable by these yardsticks flashes in Woman’s desire, something that collapses categories previously seen as mutually exclusive and stable.

That “something” erupts at the very heart of the polis, in the figure of its stability and continuity—the goddess Vesta. The virgin goddess paradoxically fans the flame of Tarpeia’s love as she sleeps:

\begin{verbatim}
dixit, et incerto permisit bracchia somno, nescia se furiis accubuisse novis. nam Vesta, liliaeae felix tutela favillae culpam alit et plures condit in ossa faces. (4.4.67–70)
\end{verbatim}

[\text{Tarpeia}] spoke, and stretched out her arms/surrendered her embrace\textsuperscript{43} to uncertain sleep, not knowing that she slept with fresh furies—for Vesta, happy guardian of the Trojan flame, nurtured her [Tarpeia’s] guilt and buried more torches [of passion] in her bones.

This witchlike Vesta answers to the twin images of Bacchant and Amazon she inspires Tarpeia to emulate, in their broadly overlapping contradictions. Here Vesta feeds passion, though herself ritually

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\textsuperscript{40} Tyrrell (above, n.38) esp. 40–63.

\textsuperscript{41} Various strands of the Amazons’ myth indicate their hostility to men: they mutilate male children for slaves, or send them away to their fathers; they will have sex with men, but steadfastly reject marriage; sometimes they are reported to refuse even cohabitation, choosing to live in a single-sex society. See DuBois (34) and Tyrrell (53–55) (both cited above, n.39).

\textsuperscript{42} On the Amazons’ homelands as always at civilization’s borders, see Tyrrell (above, n.39) 56–58; on their propensity to be drawn into war with “civilized” peoples (such as the Greeks), see DuBois (above, n.39) 32–36.

\textsuperscript{43} Regarding the ambiguity of \textit{permisit bracchia}, see Richardson (above, n.5, \textit{ad loc}).

1982) 34; W. B. Tyrrell, \textit{Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking} (Baltimore 1984) 16, 55, 77, 86–87. The myths of the Amazons’ divine attachments offer yet another curious parallel to the Maenads: some accounts have it that the Amazons, too, followed the Maenads’ god as Dionysus’ martial allies when he conquered the East (see D. S. 3.71.4); others that Dionysus was their enemy initially, but pardoned them when they became his suppliants (see Paus. 7.2.7–8; Tac. \textit{Ann.} 3.61 and W. R. Halliday’s discussion of Plut. \textit{Quaest. Gr.} 56 in \textit{The Greek Questions of Plutarch} [Oxford 1928] 210–11).

\textit{Manhater}
its enemy; she overturns Rome, her own city, from its very heart, stretching its extremes to include the Sabines; she modulates erotic passion into war and violence.44 Her flame itself embodies irresolvable contradiction. The flame came from the ruins of Troy; as evidence of Rome’s continuity and stability, it nonetheless bears the trace of transience and destruction, especially since that flame now incites Tarpeia’s betrayal of Rome.45 Vesta’s weird image points to aspects of the very heart and origins of Rome—aspects characterized as feminine—whose conceptual intractability Rome dissimulates.46 The poem marks feminine desire as a different economy of thought—a place where traditional categories of thought are exceeded, where binary opposition, as the foundation of meaning, collapses under the weight of its own conceptual inadequacy.

Vesta also inspires images that elaborate the spatial contradictions she embodies, as the foreign transient at Rome’s heart who nonetheless “protects” its boundaries (after her fashion). Let us return for a moment to the Bacchant-Amazon whom Tarpeia imitates, under Vesta’s goading: this woman in mad career cannot easily be located in anything like recognizable space. If she is a woman from Strymon, why does she run alongside the Thermodon a thousand miles from her home?47 Like the mysterious spring that opened this poem, yet another surreal geography of water shimmers before our eyes; it, too, suggests eerie mobility in apparently stable categories (such as Cappadocia versus Thrace), and it marks that mobility as feminine. Always, before thought can overtake it in this poem, the feminine is already elsewhere.

That curious conceptual lability marks Tarpeia’s own speech at the poem’s center, as she pours out her love to the indifferent night. Elsewhere in this volume, Paul Allen Miller and Charles Platter have elaborated some of the difficulties raised by the impassioned aria’s expressions of desire. Tarpeia’s ecstatic wish to be Tatius’ hostage, for example (o utinam ad vestros sedeam captiva Penatis / dum captiva mei conspicer ora Tati!, 33–34) plays curiously and paradoxically between subject and object, active and passive positions. Between the amended and unamended version of these lines, we have as possible translations “would that I, a captive, might see the face of my Tatius”; “would that I might be seen to be the captive of my Tatius”; “would that I might see the captive face of my

44 On Vesta as tutelary deity of the community, see K. Latte, Römische Religionsgeschichte (Munich 1960) 108. To enable a breach in the walls that protect that community—in this case, Rome—abrogates her peculiar divine function.

45 On the Trojan origin of Vesta’s flame, see Ovid, F. 3.417–18, 6.365, 455–56. Aeneas, according to legend, was charged with conveying the goddess’ fire from Troy to Rome (Aen. 2.296–97).

46 P. A. Miller and C. Platter offer a subtly nuanced discussion of Vesta’s ambiguity in their essay “The Crux as Symptom: Augustan Elegy and Beyond” CW 92 (1999) 449; see also Miller (above, n.34) 226.

47 Warden (above, n.9) notes the peculiarity, but sees it only as a reference to the woman’s Amazon associations: the Strymon bordered Thrace, a legendary haunt of the Amazons (177).
Tatius"—the last, as Miller and Platter point out, imagining a reciprocal love match in which each would be the captive of the other. But there is no way to decide between these competing readings on grammatical bases alone. . . . Each of these readings is defensible and the attempt to promote one over the other reveals more about the reader than the poem. Rather the very inability to assign absolute agency to either party is consonant with the structure of the poem as a whole.44

The rest of Tarpeia's soliloquy elaborates upon just that indeterminacy: she imagines herself actively offering herself, as passive object, to Tatius, sees herself as war captive, strangely pliant witch, bride, rape victim (at raptae ne sint impune Sabinae / me rape et alterna lege repende vices!, 57–58). The oddity of saying "she offers herself as rape victim"—how can she be raped when she longs for the embrace of her addresssee?—underlines, by its very logical contradiction, the slippery duplicity of fantasy, the way in which it deconstructs the notion of unified subjects and objects that underwrite normative conceptions of desire.

Tarpeia's imaginatively wishful soliloquy anticipates the logical moves in Freud's key essay on fantasy, wherein he analyzes the phenomenon as a series of syntactical permutations on the sentence "a child is being beaten" that shift the fantasizer back and forth between observer and participant, active and passive, subject and object, even female and male.49 Irigaray lays claim to psychoanalysis' instructive elucidation of that language-based instability in conceptual divisions when she imagines "feminine" syntax:

What a feminine syntax might be is not simple or easy to state, because in that "syntax" there would no longer be either subject or object, "oneness" would no longer be privileged, there would no longer be proper meanings, proper names, "proper" attributes. . . . Instead, that "syntax" would involve nearness, proximity, but in such an extreme form that it would preclude any distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation.50

The form and content of Tarpeia's fantasies trace that syntax exactly: "I wish that I were your captive/your sorceress/your bride/your rape victim" scatters Tarpeia among vagaries of will, consent, and power. On the one hand, if Tatius captures or rapes her, her consent to the action ceases to be at issue and (as Livy argued for

44 (Above, n.46).
45 SE 17:17–204.
49 "Ce que serait une syntaxe de féminin, ce n'est pas simple, ni aisé à dire, parce que dans cette 'syntaxe' il n'y aurait plus ni sujet ni objet, le 'un' n'y serait plus privilégié, il n'y aurait plus de sens propre, de nom propre, d'attributs 'propres' . . . Cette 'syntaxe' mettrait plutôt en jeu le proche, mais un si proche qu'il rendrait impossible toute discrimination d'identité, toute constitution d'appartenance, donc tout forme d' appropriation" (English translation from Irigaray [above, n.12] 134; French original in Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un [Paris 1977] 132; ellipse in original).
Lucretia) she cannot be held responsible. The infractions against Vesta and Rome she so wants would then be freed of moral consequences—in theory. Yet Tarpeia complicates her will when she herself constructs herself as passive victim within the fantasy: her daydream oxymoronically reads as “I desire not to desire the thing I desire: I wish to have it forced upon me.”

Given the uneasy conceptual fluidity Tarpeia embodies within Roman myth, Tatius’ response reads as a particularly brutal concrete metaphor: crushing her beneath Sabine shields “puts the lid on” the vertiginous questions her brief history poses. Or almost so: the poem closes with the lines “the name of the mountain was got from Tarpeia as leader; watcher, you have the reward of an unjust lot!” (a duce Tarpeia mons est cognomen adeptus / o vigil, iniustae praemia sortis habes, 4.4.93–94). The Capitoline is hers, finally, as mons Tarpeius—but whose is the injustice? The perfectly ambiguous vigil, “watcher,” glances both toward Tarpeia and Jupiter, the Capitoline’s god: Propertius has told us that she watched to open up Rome and the god watched to punish her for it. Was it unjust to kill her, or to make the god’s invaded home her monument? The poem ends in a studied refusal to sort out who is offender and who offended. The final distich’s irreducible ambiguity insists that any choice would be based on the same false conceptual distinctions that the elegy as a whole has exploded; the Tarpeia poem repudiates that choice as its ultimate ethical gesture.

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51 On consent as the logical fulcrum that divides rape from adultery, see Livy 1.58.9.
52 Miller (above, n.34) persuasively analyzes the Roman conceptualization of women as a potentially destructive, but necessary, force to be contained both literally (within the domestic space) and metaphorically (within the boundaries of decorum).
53 Butler and Barber (above, n.8, ad 93–94) judiciously summarize the possible interpretations of the vulgate reading of these lines, as well as surveying briefly the suggested emendations.