

## Revisiting Tarpeia's myth in Propertius (IV, 4)<sup>1</sup>

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I focus on Propertius' Tarpeia-elegy (IV.4) and revisit its place within Propertius' broader aetiological plan by exploring the importance of the (hitherto unremarked) Neopythagorean/Empedoclean echoes within it. These echoes justify the presence of the figure of Vesta, which has otherwise been considered eccentric, to the extent that the text has been corrected so as to remove her name. Within this framework, I explore the possible cultural influences (especially by Ennius and Varro) which made possible the syncretistic representation (Neopythagorean/Empedoclean) of Vesta as personification of the Empedoclean Strife. The contrast of the Empedoclean elements of water and fire within the elegy is accordingly seen as the progressive elimination of Love from the poem. In order to demonstrate Propertius' flirtation with philosophical ideas further, I analyze Ovid's double rewriting of the same myth (*Met.* 14.775-804, *Fasti* 1.255-76) and consider his cunning reaction to Propertius' philosophical echoes in the myth of Tarpeia.

In the programmatic elegy of his last book Propertius claims that he is about to write patriotic poetry, by way of becoming Callimachus *Romanus* and explaining the origin of Roman rites, deities and names of ancient places, along the lines laid down by his Hellenistic predecessor in his *Aitia* (IV.1A.1-70). Consistent with the agenda he has set, Propertius distributes through the book a group of five aetiological poems (IV.2, 4, 6, 9, 10). Within the same introductory elegy, while the poet presents us with the topographical survey of the sites on which he is about to shed light, he declares that one of his topics is going to be the Tarpeian hill on which father Jupiter dwells (*Tarpeiusque Pater nuda de rupe tonabat* / Tarpeian Jupiter thundered from a bare rock, VI.1.7).<sup>2</sup> He thus announces the theme of the Tarpeia elegy (IV.4), which is devoted to the aetiological version of the origin of the *saxum Tarpeium* in Rome and the story of Tarpeia's betrayal of the Capitoline to the Sabines. According to this, the Sabines had encamped below the hill; while Tarpeia was fetching water from a nearby spring, she saw the Sabine king and fell in love with him at first sight. She thus betrayed the fortress to him, aspiring to become his wife; instead, the king ordered his men to throw their shields on her and crush her to death. In memory of this mythical episode, the rock was named after Tarpeia.

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<sup>2</sup> Propertius' text and translations are by Heyworth (2007a) and (2007b), unless otherwise stated.

Despite Propertius' opening statement, in the second part of the introductory elegy the astrologer Horos advises him to remain devoted to love poetry, since amatory elements are an essential part of the elegiac genre and hence every effort to write on patriotic themes is doomed to failure (IV.1B.71-150). In line with this, scholars have doubted the fulfilment of Propertius' claims, questioning the nature of his Callimacheanism as well as his renunciation of amatory themes in favour of patriotic ones; and the Tarpeia elegy in particular has been considered the most prominent example of the subversion of Propertius' plan. More precisely, in the introductory verses of the elegy, the patriotic persona harshly condemns Tarpeia's action (IV.4.1-2):<sup>3</sup>

*Tarpeium nemus et Tarpeiae turpe sepulcrum  
fabor et antiqui limina capta Iouis.*

The Tarpeian grove and the base tomb of Tarpeia I shall tell and the capture of Jove's ancient threshold.

In connection with this, Miller has pointed out that in this elegy 'Propertius exhibits a distinctly un-Callimachean persona. Instead of the lively scholar of the "Aitia", we encounter a solemn patriotic persona for the presentation of the national Roman subjects'.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, if we were to ignore for a moment these two introductory verses of the elegy, the story would vividly remind us of an epyllion bearing the stamp of the neoteric tradition. The poet grants Tarpeia a long monologue (IV.4.31-66) by means of which her female point of view is underscored. As Stahl puts it, 'the narrative of 4.4 leans as closely as possible on the program of 4.1A whereas the centrepiece moves away from it as far as possible... In 4.4 the program itself is symmetrically wrapped around its very negation'.<sup>5</sup> Last but not least, the myth of Tarpeia allows of a twofold—and hence ambiguous—political interpretation. Welch notes that 'though her betrayal was memorialized in the Tarpeian rock, for example, Tarpeia was also venerated at her tomb in the city, which is no longer extant. These two Roman places—Tarpeia's rock and her altar—create an ideological contradiction: her betrayal of Rome is to be condemned (the symbolism of the rock) while her contribution to Roman pluralism is to be commended (via worship at the tomb)'.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the reader is puzzled by Propertius' choice of topic which potentially undermines his aspirations to write patriotic poetry.

<sup>3</sup> Note the combination of alliteration and paronomasia in *Tarpeium*, *Tarpeiae* and *turpe* in the very first line of the poem, which suggests an etymological connection between *Tarpeia* and *turpis* and underscores her shameful action. For further discussion of this line see Boyd (1984).

<sup>4</sup> Miller (1982) 383. O' Neill (1995) characteristically discusses Propertius' repudiating of the 'burden' of aetiology in favor of amatory themes.

<sup>5</sup> Stahl (1985) 299. See also Wyke (1987a) 163: 'Poem 4.4 places Tarpeia at the centre of the elegiac world and warfare on its periphery... Considerable space—almost half the elegiac poem—is dedicated to the female subject's point of view.' *ead.* 165: 'The application of eroticism to military matters, the softening of weapons that Tarpeia describes as her goal, fulfills the poetic command to engage with the apparent polarities of *arma* and *amor*.' For Tarpeia's female point of view as well as her enhanced characterization as a traitor see also Green (2004b) 363-9.

<sup>6</sup> Welch (2005) 56.

Ovid replies twice to Propertius' Tarpeia elegy. In his *Metamorphoses*, he makes the story part of the narration of legends of early Rome which culminates with the apotheosis of Romulus (*Met.* 14.775-804). First, he briefly recounts Tarpeia's betrayal of the citadel to the Sabines and her violent death (*Met.* 14.775-7). He then resumes the story from where Propertius' elegy ends and narrates the repulse of the Sabines from the citadel of Rome by a sudden eruption of boiling water. In this way, he offers an aetiology of the existence of hot springs which were located close to the temple of Janus Geminus / Quirinus, known as the Lautolae (Varro *LL* 5.156 *Lautolae ab lavando, quod ibi ad Ianum Geminum aquae caldae fuerunt*). Ovid takes up again this story in the first Book of his *Fasti* where Janus answers questions concerning his role in the history of Rome (1.255-76).<sup>7</sup> The god presents us with the mythological aetiology of his temple Janus Geminus along with the existence of hot springs nearby: when the treacherous Tarpeia led the Sabines into the Roman citadel, Janus saved Rome by opening hot springs which repelled the enemies. In thanks for this deed a temple was dedicated to him. We should bear in mind for the discussion to follow that Ovid is the first and only extant writer who combines the myth of Tarpeia's treachery with the repulse of the Sabines by a sudden eruption of boiling water.<sup>8</sup>

In the present paper, I will argue that Ovid rewrites Propertius' Tarpeia elegy by disclosing (hitherto unremarked) Neopythagorean/Empedoclean echoes which are latent in Propertius' text, and cunningly manipulating them, while inverting them. At the same time, Ovid's interpretation sheds light upon the place of the Tarpeia elegy within Propertius' broader aetiological plan.

Propertius differentiates his version of the myth in two pivotal respects. While according to the standard version Tarpeia's motive for her betrayal is greed for gold,<sup>9</sup> in Propertius it is the power of love that instigates her shameless action. Although this version overlaps with that of Simylus (quoted by Plutarch *Rom.* 17.5), due to lack of chronological evidence we cannot say for sure whether Propertius follows him, or rather introduces his own innovation.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, instead of presenting Tarpeia as daughter of Spurius Tarpeius, the commander of the Roman citadel, Propertius follows Varro (*LL* 5.41) in making her a Vestal virgin. Since Vesta was not venerated before Numa, Propertius anachronistically transfers her to Romulus' Rome and makes Tarpeia her priestess. By means of this change, not only does Tarpeia's betrayal become even more heinous due to her status, but Propertius is allowed to involve the figure of Vesta in the narrative. In fact, Vesta's intervention should be considered the key for the present interpretation of the poem.

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<sup>7</sup> Heinze (1919) 35-7; Barchiesi (1991-1992); Green (2004a) 121-8; Murgatroyd (2005) 32-4, 255-8. The translation of Ovid's *Fasti* is quoted from Frazer (revised by Goold, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Green (2004a) 121.

<sup>9</sup> Varro *LL* 5.41; Livy 1.10; Dionys. Hal. *Ant.* 2.38.2-3 (citing Fabius Pictor fr. 8 P and Cincius fr. 5 P); Ovid *Fast.* 1.260-1 and *Met.* 14.776-7; Valerius Maximus 9.6.1; Plut. *Rom.* 17 (citing Antigonus *FGrH* 816 F2).

<sup>10</sup> Simylus' story does not refer to the reign of Romulus, but to the sack of Rome by the Gauls about 390 BC. His Tarpeia was in love not with Tattius but with the Gallic chieftain Brennus.

Even before Vesta's appearance in the elegy, Tarpeia is already thinking of possible ways to fulfil her erotic passion, which she unfolds in her long monologue (IV.4.31-66). As Wyke writes: 'the Vestal virgin does bring an erotic interest to military matters... When Tarpeia expresses a desire to carry love into military camps (*in castra reponet amores*, 37), she thus discloses the manner in which the elegiac woman implements a requirement of the fourth book.'<sup>11</sup> Yet, once Vesta takes action, she is the one who determines the outcome of the poem (IV 4.67-70):<sup>12</sup>

*dixit, et incerto permisit bracchia somno,  
nescia se furiis accubuisse nouis:  
nam Vesta, Iliacae felix tutela fauillae,  
culpam alit et plures condit in ossa faces.*

She finished speaking and yielded her arms to fitful sleep, not knowing that she lay with new agents of madness: for Vesta, successful guardian of the Trojan embers, nurtures her fault and buries more torches in her bones.

According to the standard interpretation, Vesta embodies the principle of love, since it is she who instigates and nurtures Tarpeia's sin (*culpam alit*, 70); in fact the flame that survives from Troy (*Iliacae... fauillae*, 69) and assures Rome's survival, becomes the flame of Tarpeia's passion (*faces*, 70). From this moment on, Tarpeia is no longer in control of her behaviour. The role of Vesta in the elegy has been considered a real conundrum, since this action seems irreconcilable with her virginity and her solemn profile. To quote Fantham: 'Vesta symbolized several things dear to Augustus: his Trojan ancestry, his role as avenger of his father Iulus, the chastity of his family, the perpetuity of his house.'<sup>13</sup> That is why the name of Vesta in line 69, the standard reading according to the manuscript tradition, has even been doubted by some scholars and been replaced by that of Venus.<sup>14</sup> In Richardson's words: 'the fires and torches of love are the province of Venus and Amor, and for Vesta to arrogate them to herself to compass so cruel a purpose as the further undoing of her votary is monstrous.'<sup>15</sup> Not only, however, can this emendation be plausibly refuted, but in fact it is particularly revealing as regards the actual role of Vesta within the poem.

To begin with, such a claim takes no notice of Vesta's syncretism with Venus within the broader framework of their assimilation mainly with Earth and then with other female goddesses. This syncretism is testified in several sources. For example, Varro in his *Antiquitates Rerum Divinarum* assimilates *Tellus* with several deities, among them Venus and Vesta (*tellurem, inquit Varro, putant esse... Vestam, quod vestiatur herbis* / They think, Varro says, that *Tellus* is... Vesta because she is 'vested' in flowers, fr. 268 Cardauns).<sup>16</sup> Given that Propertius turns

<sup>11</sup> Wyke (1987a) 163.

<sup>12</sup> Note that Heyworth (2007a) 163 changes Vesta to Venus.

<sup>13</sup> Fantham (1983) 208.

<sup>14</sup> Richardson (1977) 439; Goold (1990) 390; Heyworth (2007a) 163. On the other hand, see Fedeli (1994) 240, Hutchinson (2006) 38 who retain the reading Vesta.

<sup>15</sup> Richardson (1977) 439.

<sup>16</sup> Green (2002) 97, who discusses the association of Vesta with Venus in Ovid's *Fasti*. Cf. also Varro *Antiquitates Rerum Divinarum* fr. 283 Cardauns (Aug. civ. 4.10 p.159.13): *quis enim ferat,*

to Varro as a source for Tarpeia's myth, the latter could also be considered as a possible source for Vesta's atypical deed. The equation of Vesta with other female goddesses is also found in Ennius' *Euhemerus* (cf. Lactantius *Div. Inst.* I.13, 14).<sup>17</sup> It should be borne in mind for the discussion to follow that Ennius has appropriated within his work various elements of Empedocles' doctrine. To mention just a few examples, Ennius' dream of Homer in *Annales* 1, in which the latter remembers that he became a peacock before his soul passed into Ennius (fr. 11 Sk.), shows close affinity with Empedocles' account of the transmigration of souls. The Empedoclean four elements appear to be the model for *Annales* 7 (fr. 220 Sk.).<sup>18</sup> As far as Varro is concerned, his association with Pythagoreanism should also be taken for granted; according to Pliny, his burial conformed to the 'Pythagorean style' in a clay coffin with leaves of myrtle, olive and black poplar (Pliny *Nat. Hist.* 35.160). In a similar vein, his book entitled *Hebdomades* or *On Portraits* began with a praise of the number seven in the Pythagorean style.<sup>19</sup> In line with these, we may claim that in both Ennius' and Varro's works, the process of Vesta's assimilation with Venus has plausibly taken place under Neopythagorean/Empedoclean influence. What is more, within this tradition Venus was considered the embodiment of the Empedoclean power of creation, as she is notably sketched in Lucretius' proem to his first book (*DRN* 1.1-49).<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, to dispute Vesta's presence in this context is to take no heed of the ambiguities that are inherent in her character, which Propertius appears to be conscious of and exploits. The contradictions in the cult of Vesta have been variously discussed.<sup>21</sup> As Miller and Platter remark in connection with the presence of Vesta within the elegy in question: 'does Roman religious thought truly portray the domain of the Vestals as intrinsically opposed to the fertility and sexual activity represented by Venus?'<sup>22</sup> At this point we should turn again to Propertius' elegy IV.1A (line 21):

*Vesta coronatis pauper gaudebat asellis;*

Vesta was poor and rejoiced in garlanded asses

In these verses the poet refers to the Vesta of early Rome, the patroness of bakers and their donkeys. Henceforth, Vesta was associated with the millers who

*quod, cum tantum honoris et quasi castitatis igni tribuerint, aliquando Vestam non erubescunt etiam Venerem dicere? / Who, indeed, could tolerate the fact that although they have attributed so much honour and, as it were, chastity to fire, they sometimes do not blush to say that Vesta is also Venus? (translated by Green).*

<sup>17</sup> For Ennius' *Euhemerus* see Courtney (1999) 27-39, especially fr. III (Vahlen) with commentary 31-2.

<sup>18</sup> For Ennius' Empedoclean *Discordia taetra* in *Annales* 7 (frs. 225-226 Sk.) or the *Paluda virago* (fr. 220 Sk.) see p.8 below. Ennius' Neopythagorean *Epicharmus* also began with a reference to a prophetic dream, in which the narrator expounds an account of cosmology (cf. especially *Epicharmus* frs. 1, 2, 7 Vahlen). For Ennius' *Epicharmus* see Kahn (2001) 87-9; Dutsch (forthcoming).

<sup>19</sup> For Varro's Pythagoreanism see Kahn (2001) 88-9. For Varro and Empedocles see Deschamps (1986).

<sup>20</sup> For Empedoclean Venus in Lucretius see Garani (2007a) 34-43.

<sup>21</sup> On Vesta's ambiguous sexual identity see Beard (1980) and (1995).

<sup>22</sup> Miller-Platter (1999) 449.

ground the grain to make the *mola salsa* and their donkeys; the episode was commemorated during the festival of Vestalia (June 9-15). This myth is the only context in which Vesta—who otherwise is represented by a flame, not an *effigies*—appears ‘incorporated’ in a womanly form. Propertius offers just a hint at this tale which is later developed in Ovid’s *Fasti* (*Fasti* 6.309-18).<sup>23</sup> In this way, Propertius can endow her with an energetic role in the story of Tarpeia. More importantly, given that her association with donkeys contradicts her solemn nationalistic character, a lurking element of farce is introduced into her mythology. This playful dimension which coexists with the chaste one shakes the certainty of the reader about Vesta’s expected behaviour.

Taking into consideration, therefore, both Vesta’s Neopythagorean connections, which associate her with (Empedoclean) Venus and her fluctuating identity, this potentially being either solemn or playful, chaste or erotic, we may turn to the rest of the elegy.

Just after the verses describing Vesta’s intervention, the narrator introduces a simile (71-2):

*illa furit, qualis celerem prope Thermodonta  
Strymonis abscisso pectus aperta sinu.*

She goes mad, like a Thracian bacchant beside the swift Thermodon, her clothes torn to reveal her breast.

In her frenzy, Tarpeia is compared with a Strymonian bacchant on the banks of the Thermodon. This image strikingly merges the figure of a Thracian woman with that of an Amazon. How can one account for such a mythical conflation? To begin with, in the *Aeneid* the dwelling place of Jupiter on the Tarpeian hill was pointed out to Aeneas by Evander (*Aen.* 8.347).<sup>24</sup> This allusion to Vergil is thus consonant with Propertius’ plan to accommodate Vergilian epic within the confines of elegy.<sup>25</sup> More importantly, Propertius engages with the Vergilian intertext in a more intricate way: as scholars have already pointed out, by means of this simile Tarpeia harks back to another female figure who is tortured by desperate love, the Vergilian Dido (*Aen.* 4.300-3).<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Fantham (1983) 207: ‘There was only one context in which Vesta was regularly represented in womanly form, and this was the *lararia* of bakers or millers. Here as the remains of Pompeii show, she was usually portrayed veiled and holding a scepter and patera for libation and accompanied by a donkey.’ On this basis, Ovid also narrates a mythical episode, according to which Priapus attempted to rape the sleeping Vesta, but the braying of Silenus’ donkey woke her up and saved her (*Fasti* 6.319-48). For Ovid’s treatment of the myth of Vesta and Priapus see Fantham (1983) 201-9; Newlands (1995) 124-45. Regarding Vesta’s paradoxical sexual nature, it is also worth mentioning that in Ovid’s Priapus myth, while Vesta’s failed rape highlights her connection with fertility, the donkey preserves her chastity, even though as an animal it is renowned for its sexual licence: see *Priap.* 52.9; *Juv.* 9.92 with Mills (1978) 304-5.

<sup>24</sup> A certain Tarpeia is also named among the companions of Camilla (*Aen.* 11.655-8).

<sup>25</sup> Wyke (1987a) 162.

<sup>26</sup> Warden (1978); Hutchinson (2006) 132. For verbal cross-references between the Tarpeia elegy and the Vergilian Dido see Reisch (1887) 140-1; La Penna (1950) 215 n.1. Translations from Vergil are by Fairclough (revised by Goold, 1999-2000).

MYRTO GARANI, REVISITING TARPEIA'S MYTH IN PROPERTIUS (IV, 4)

*saevit inops animi totamque incensa per urbem* 300  
*bacchatur, qualis commotis excita sacris*  
*Thyias, ubi audito stimulant trieterica Baccho*  
*orgia nocturnusque uocat clamore Cithaeron.*

Helpless in mind she rages, and all aflame raves through the city, like some Thyiad startled by the shaken emblems, when she has heard the Bacchic cry: the biennial revels fire her and at night Cithaeron summons her with its din.

Dido herself is compared with a Bacchanal wildly revelling on Mount Cithaeron in Boeotia in honour of the god Bacchus. From this moment on, Dido begins to lose control over her actions. This lunatic behaviour will eventually bring about her destruction. Yet Dido's fate has also been foreshadowed by her implicit comparison with the Amazon Penthesilea in the first book of the *Aeneid* (*Aen.* 1.490-2):<sup>27</sup>

*Ducit Amazonidum lunatis agmina peltis* 490  
*Penthesilea furens mediisque in milibus ardet,*  
*aurea subnectens exsertae cingula mammae,*  
*bellatrix, audetque viris concurrere virgo.*

Penthesilea in fury leads the crescent-shielded ranks of the Amazons and blazes amid her thousands; a golden belt she binds below her naked breast, and, as a warrior queen, dares battle, a maid clashing with men.

Penthesilea is the last figure that Aeneas sees on the frieze that decorates the walls of the temple of Juno when he arrives at Carthage. She is also the last figure seen before Dido's appearance. Instead of Tarpeia's Vesta, it is Venus who instructs the disguised Cupid to breathe love into Dido.

Tarpeia simultaneously harks back to another Vergilian character, Amata.<sup>28</sup> This time Juno calls on Allecto, the Vergilian agent of fury and discord, to sow the seeds of war (cf. *Aen.* 7.325-6: *cui tristia bella / iraeque insidiaeque et crimina noxia cordi* / whose heart is set on gloomy wars, passions, plots, and baneful crimes). Allecto picks up one of her snakes and hurls it at Amata (*Aen.* 7.347). Like Tarpeia, who is unaware of the assault of the new demons (*nescia se furiis accubuisse novis*, IV.4.68), Amata herself does not realize that the goddess' snake injects poison deep inside her and inflames her (*ille inter vestis et levia pectora lapsus / voluitur attactu nullo, fallitque furentem / vipeream inspirans animam /* Gliding between her raiment and smooth breasts, it winds its way unfelt and, unseen by the frenzied woman, breathes into her its viperous breath, *Aen.* 7.349-51). Amata, like Dido and Tarpeia, is also compared to a Maenad (*Aen.* 7.385-91, 404-5):

*quin etiam in silvas, simulato numine Bacchi* 385  
*maius adorta nefas maioremque orsa furorem*  
*evolat et natam frondosis montibus abdit,*  
*quo thalamum eripiat Teucris taedasque moretur,*

<sup>27</sup> For parallels between Dido and Penthesilea see Segal (1990) especially 3-7; Putnam (1998) 255-62.

<sup>28</sup> Warden (1978) 186 with further bibliography. See also Rothstein (1898) *ad loc.*; D'Arbela (1964) *ad loc.*; Heinze (1993) 280 n.52.

*euhoë Bacche fremens, solum te virgine dignum*  
*vociferans: etenim mollis tibi sumere thyrsos,* 390  
*te lustrare choro, sacrum tibi pascere crinem.*

Nay more, feigning the spirit of Bacchus, essaying a greater sin and launching a greater madness, she flies forth to the forest, and hides her daughter in the leafy mountains, in order by this means to rob the Teucrians of their marriage and delay the nuptial torch. 'Evoë Bachhus!' she shrieks. 'You alone', she shouts, 'are worthy of the maiden! It is for you, in truth, she takes up the waving thyrsus, to you she pays honour in the dance, for you she grows her sacred tresses.'

*talem inter silvas, inter deserta ferarum* 404  
*reginam Allecto stimulis agit undique Bacchi*

So fares it with the queen, as amid woods, amid wild beasts' coverts, Allecto drives her far and wide with Bacchic goad.

While the other two heroines were explicitly compared to Maenads, Amata pretends to become one and causes the women of the city to follow her, after her failed appeal to Latinus not to give his daughter in marriage to Aeneas.<sup>29</sup> More to the point, by hurling a snake at Amata, a torch at Turnus and madness at Ascanius' dogs, Allecto causes the war to begin (*Aen.* 7.475-510). And as has been well discussed, Allecto harks back to Ennius' demonic *Discordia taetra* (fr. 225-226 Sk.) or the *Paluda virago* (fr. 220 Sk.) who opens the *Janus Geminus* at the outbreak of the Second Punic war and hurls Rome into the chaos of war with Carthage in *Annales* 7.<sup>30</sup> This transition from peace to war in Roman history has been convincingly connected by Ennius with the cyclic alternation between cosmic Love and Strife, and his *Discordia taetra* has been identified with the Empedoclean principle of Strife.<sup>31</sup> Allecto thus appears to be the Vergilian equivalent of the Empedoclean Strife.

Returning to Propertius' poem, Tarpeia's action insinuates allusions to both Dido and Amata, the former being deceived by a goddesses who represents the power of love (Dido by Venus *via* Cupid: *fallasque veneno*, 1.688), the latter, on the contrary, by one who embodies the principle of strife (Amata by Juno *via* Allecto: *fallitque furem*, 7.350). This allusion to Amata gives Tarpeia's elegiac love a new twist and destabilizes the so far crystallized function of Vesta as instigator of it. While the allusion to Vergil's Venus underscores the elegiac aspect of Tarpeia who acts like Dido under the power of love, Vesta's intervention is also revealed to be conditioned by her intertextual association with the Vergilian Allecto, the Empedoclean principle of Strife.

At this point, the reader should recall that already in the course of her monologue, Tarpeia's thoughts strikingly alternate between love and warlike

<sup>29</sup> Nelis (2001) 290.

<sup>30</sup> For Vergil's allusion to Ennius' *Discordia* see Norden (1915) 18-33. Lucretius' Venus and Mars should, of course, be considered Vergil's other main intertext for the latter's reception of Empedoclean echoes. See now Hardie (2009) on *Discordia* and Vergil's *Fama*.

<sup>31</sup> Norden (1915) 10-30; Bignone (1929) 22. The historical setting is probably the revolt of the Falerii, in 241 BC, provoking the re-opening of the *Janus Geminus*, which had been closed at the end of the First Punic War. See also Skutsch (1985) 394-6 and 403-4.

violence. In the first place, she envisages her capture by the king (IV.4.33-4). Next she imagines her marriage to Tatius (IV.4.55-6). She then offers herself to be raped in revenge for the rape of the Sabine women (IV.4.57-62), suggesting that a violent action, i.e. war, can bring about peace. Then again, Tarpeia imagines a different scenario for peace: while in Livy the abducted Sabine women separated the fighting lines by pleading with their Sabine brothers and fathers on the one hand and their Roman husbands on the other to make peace (1.13.2), here she invents a counter-version to this and believes that she is able to release the forces engaged in battle by means of her wedding (IV.4.59-62).<sup>32</sup> What is even more noteworthy, within this monologue, Tarpeia makes allusion to two mythical tales involving sexual violence with a similar historical bearing (as we will see below) to that of Tarpeia's betrayal, since both of them ultimately led to significant political changes.<sup>33</sup> In the first instance, when she mentions Romulus' connection with the wolf that suckled him (*te toga picta decet, non quem sine matris honore / nutrit inhumanae dura papilla lupae* / The coloured toga suits you, not the one whom the hard teat of an inhuman she-wolf nourished since he had no mother, IV.4.53-4), she calls to mind the rape by Mars of another Vestal Virgin, Rhea Silvia, while she was performing her Vestal duties, and her punishment for it to be buried alive.<sup>34</sup> This rape brought about the birth of Romulus, the founder of Rome. At the same time, as we have just seen, Tarpeia explicitly refers to the rape of the Sabine maidens, which ultimately resulted in the fusion of Sabines with Romans. In both cases, there is a parallel process: it is strife—not love—that precedes a historical development and is revealed to be its precondition.<sup>35</sup>

As a consequence of Propertius' double allusion to the Vergilian intertext, while Tarpeia still appears to oscillate between love and war, these two notions acquire now a cosmological dimension, since they can be viewed as the Empedoclean powers of creation and destruction.<sup>36</sup> In other words, given the fact that Tarpeia is already in love at the moment of Vesta's appearance, the reader is now uncertain as to whether Vesta can be identified with the embodiment of the

<sup>32</sup> Stahl (1985) 294: 'Tarpeia pictures a story of "The Rape of the Roman Woman" as a countermove against the abduction of the Sabine Women.'

<sup>33</sup> See Arieti (1980), although his case about Empedoclean echoes in Livy is not convincing.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Livy 1.4; Ovid *Fasti* 3.11-24; Dionys. Hal. 1.77.1.

<sup>35</sup> For a different approach to violence as a factor in political development see Janan (2001) 75, who comments that 'sexual unions, whether rapes, marriages or seductions, regularly "breach" the polity's defining limits so that it may move on to a new phase... 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.'

<sup>36</sup> To add another possible intertext, in Book 3 of Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* Aphrodite bribes Eros with a ball which represents the Empedoclean cosmic sphere, Σφαῖρος, into which all the elements unite when Love takes control over them (*Argon.* 3.131-44). Eros then shoots his arrow at Medea: in this case, it is Empedoclean Love that regulates the cosmic order. See Hunter (1989) 111-3 *ad loc.* As Nelis (2000) 100 puts it: 'Empedoclean Love and Strife seem to alternate within the epic tradition with almost the same cyclic regularity that characterizes their control of the elements.' For more Empedoclean echoes in Apollonius Rhodius see Kyriakou (1994); Nelis (2000).

Empedoclean Love, which anyway clashes with the elegiac unfulfilled love, or that of Strife.

In either case we should bear in mind that Vesta figures as a regulating power of cosmic order which will eventually bring about a significant political change, the fusion of the Romans with the Sabines. Given the role of Tatius, the Sabine king, in forming the three tribes of the Roman race (*prima galeritus posuit praetoria Lycmon, / magnaue pars Tatio rerum erat inter oves. / hinc Titius Ramnesque viri Luceresque Soloni; / quattuor hinc albos Romulus egit equos* / Lycmon in his cap of skin first set up a general's headquarters, and a great part of Tatius' campaigning was among sheep. Hence the Titius, the heroic Ramnes, and the Luceres from Solonium; hence the four white horses Romulus drove, IV.1.29-32), Tarpeia plays an important role in the history of the city: her *felix culpa* made possible the union of Sabines with Romans. In fact, the Caesars claimed descent from the Sabine king.<sup>37</sup> To underline this political dimension, Propertius makes the story take place on the day celebrating the *Parilia*, in commemoration of the foundation of Rome (*urbi festus erat: dixere Parilia patres: / hic primus coepit moenibus esse dies, / annua pastorum convivium, lusus in urbe* / The city had a festival; our fathers called it the Parilia: at the beginning this was the first day for the walls, an annual party of the shepherds, games in the city, IV.4.73-75).

It thus turns out that both the innovations that Propertius introduces into the myth make it possible for the Empedoclean concepts of Love and Strife to cross the threshold of his aetiological poem. More precisely, Tarpeia's status as Vestal virgin in line with Varro's version allows for Vesta's presence, the latter's identity being dependent on the Neopythagorean interpretation of Venus, her Varronian equivalent, as a personification of Empedoclean Love. At the same time, Propertius' option of female love instead of greed as Tarpeia's initial motif creates the precondition for this love to be counterbalanced and ultimately overcome by the power of cosmic Strife.

Ovid was very familiar with Neopythagorean/Empedoclean ideas, probably directly, and certainly indirectly through various intertextual channels such as Ennius, Varro, Lucretius and Vergil. Accordingly, he embraces them in his *Metamorphoses*, most prominently in the cosmology of the proem to Book 1 and in connection with the famous speech of Pythagoras in Book 15, an eclectic amalgamation of ideas against meat-eating and animal sacrifice, about the transmigration of souls and the principles of cosmic transformation (*Met.* 15.75-478). In fact, Hardie went so far so as to claim, persuasively, that Ovid read Roman epic tradition as 'Empedoclean epos'.<sup>38</sup> Within the same framework, Janus, the narrator of our story in the *Fasti*, has already been identified with Empedoclean Chaos, who was then metamorphosed into an anthropomorphic god with two faces (*Fasti* 1.101-44).<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the passage on the history of animal

<sup>37</sup> Grimal (1951) and (1953) 25-8; Baker (1968) 344; Pinotti (1974); Wyke (1987a).

<sup>38</sup> For Empedoclean echoes in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* see Pascal (1905); Hardie (1995); Wheeler (2000) 12-23; Nelis (2009). It is far beyond the limits of this paper to discuss the fact that Ovid was an eclectic, and therefore it should be taken for granted that other philosophical ideas coexist.

<sup>39</sup> Hardie (1991).

sacrifice that follows (*Fasti* 1.337-456) contains a so-called 'Empedoclean fingerprint'.<sup>40</sup>

In line with this, I would like to argue that Ovid is plausibly proved a very astute reader of the Empedoclean echoes that Propertius insinuates into the Tarpeia elegy. In other words, he perceives the bearing of Propertius' simultaneous allusions to Vesta's intertextual counterparts in Vergil (Juno, Allecto) and Ennius (Discordia) as well as Varro's Venus, themselves heavily burdened with Empedoclean echoes. And so he rewrites Propertius' story by disclosing these philosophical hints and further intensifying them, offering his own version, itself based on the same philosophical grounds. Perhaps it should not be considered a mere coincidence that, like Propertius, Ovid too draws his information from Varro.

One could possibly even think that Ovid turns back to the introductory elegy of Propertius' Book 4 and reconsiders Horos' warning. Horos traces his roots back to the famous Hellenistic astronomers Conon and Archytas, the latter being the last prominent figure in the early Pythagorean tradition (*me creat Archytae suboles, Babylonius Orops, / Horon, et a proavo ducta Conone domus / Babylonian Orops, the offspring of Archytas, fathered me, Horos, and the house derives from our forefather Conon, IV.1B.77-8*). Horos' association with Archytas possibly points to the former's affiliation with Neopythagorean tradition—itsself closely related to the reception of Empedoclean ideas in Rome—and correspondingly could be considered as foreshadowing the presence of philosophical echoes in the elegies to follow. At the same time, Horos' warning against patriotic poetry may establish the framework within which these echoes can be embraced.

Ovid seems to discern the ambiguous traits of Propertius' Vesta. That is why he modifies the protagonists of his divine theatre. In his *Metamorphoses* he replaces Vesta by splitting her contradictory aspects into two goddesses. On the one hand, he introduces Saturnian Juno as the agent who, rather than Tarpeia, unfastens the hinges of one gate to let the enemy into the citadel. Whereas Vesta employs Tarpeia as her organ, Juno's intervention in the Ovidian story is direct (*Met. 14.781-2 unam tamen ipse reclusit / nec strepitum verso Saturnia cardine fecit / But Saturnian Juno herself unfastened one of these, opening the gate on noiseless hinges*). The goddess thus takes her place in the long intertextual line which starts in Latin literature with Ennius' Discordia (*Ann. fr. 225 Sk.*) and continues with Lucretius' Mars (*DRN 1.29-40*), Vergil's Juno and Allecto and—at least according to Ovid's reading—Propertius' Vesta (IV.4) as different embodiments of Empedoclean Strife. On the other hand, unlike Propertius' story in which there is no divine force to thwart Tarpeia in her action, Ovid brings in Venus and the Ausonian water-nymphs to stand on the opposite side, as protectors of the Romans (*Met. 14.783-90*):

*sola Venus portae cecidisse repagula sensit  
et clausura fuit, nisi quod rescindere numquam*

<sup>40</sup> Garani (forthcoming a). For more on Empedocles in Ovid's *Fasti* see Pfligersdorffer (1973); Lefèvre (1976); Labate (2005).

*dis licet acta deum. Iano loca iuncta tenebant* 785  
*naides Ausoniae gelido rorantia fonte:*  
*has rogat auxilium, nec nymphae iusta petentem*  
*sustinuere deam venasque et flumina fontis*  
*elicuere sui; nondum tamen invia Iani*  
*ora patentis erant, neque iter praecluserat unda:* 790

Venus alone perceived that the gate's bars had fallen, and would have closed it; but it is never permitted to gods to undo the acts of gods. Now the Ausonian water-nymphs held a spot near Janus' fane, where a cold spring bubbled forth. Venus asked aid of these, nor did the nymphs refuse the goddess her just request, but opened up their fountain's streaming veins. Up to that time the pass of Janus was still open, nor had the water even blocked the way.

Venus entreats the water-nymphs to heat their water, so as to defend the citadel. In contrast to their passive presence in Propertius as receivers of Tarpeia's flowers (*saepe tulit blandis argentea lilia nymphis / Romula ne faciem laederet hasta Tati* / often she offered silvery lilies to the compliant nymphs, with a prayer that Romulus's spear not harm Tatius's face, IV.4.25-6), they now assume an essentially active role in the narrative. As we will see below in detail, they burn pitch and sulphur so as to heat the water. Hence boiling water prevents the enemy from entering the gateway.

Turning now to the version we read in the *Fasti*, we should first point out that contrary to Propertius and to his own *Metamorphoses*, Ovid here eliminates any elements of warfare. In the case of Propertius the military element prevailed. Fox comments that 'Tarpeia's love of *arma* imbues what is essentially the account of a battle with an erotic element... The *militia amoris* is here extended further... Tarpeia's love of Tatius is totally defined by his military attraction. Her wish to be captured is entirely literal, although the motivation is erotic'.<sup>41</sup> One can also easily spot the epic character of the passage in the *Metamorphoses*: there is a clash between two goddesses and the battle instigated is described at length (*Met.* 14.799-804). In the *Fasti*, on the contrary, there is neither battle nor bloodshed between Romans and Sabines; nor is there any mention of Tarpeia's death.<sup>42</sup> This shift, which is imposed primarily—but not only—by generic reasons, is signalled by the substitution of *arma* with the diminutive *armillae*.<sup>43</sup> Tarpeia herself is said to be a *levis custos* (*Fasti* 1.261); the meaningful adjective *levis* which points to the 'light' subject matter of elegy in contrast to the 'heavier' one of epic poetry rehabilitates Tarpeia's elegiac identity, which faded as a result of her

<sup>41</sup> Fox (1996) 160-2.

<sup>42</sup> Green (2004a) 122 also remarks that 'genre is indeed a useful way of accounting for some of the differences between the two versions of the story in *Met.* and *Fasti*. However, the nature of the story in *Fasti* is also determined by more immediate concerns, such as the character of the primary narrator, the needs of the questioner, and the time delay between event and recollection. As a deity who shuns warfare and maintains peace (253), it is fitting that Janus should narrate the story and deal with the Sabines in a bloodless manner.'

<sup>43</sup> Barchiesi (1991-1992) 15. See also Green (2004a) 123: 'Read generically, one can view *armillae* as a compromise, a way of accommodating the subject-matter within elegy. However, despite the reduction, *arma* is not totally eliminated, and this is a consistent trend in the poem.' For the 'pacifistic' character of *Fasti* see Hinds (1992a) and (1992b).

contamination with epic elements.<sup>44</sup> Yet Ovid appears very allusive in his details about Tarpeia's action. The heroine is not even named; she is just the traitress keeper; her role in the story is thus further shrunk. In addition, while in the *Metamorphoses* there is no reference to Tarpeia's motive for her betrayal, in the *Fasti* Ovid dispenses with the heroine's love and returns to the traditional version of the myth, by presenting her as bribed by the enemies' golden armlets. In other words, since Propertius' Tarpeia 'failed' as an elegiac figure, Ovid resorts to her textual 'death' so as to enhance the elegiac character of the story.

Ovid focuses once again on the actions of the gods and their outcome, seen this time, however, through his elegiac prism. Here too Juno, Saturn's envious daughter, is the one who opens the gate for the Sabines. Yet, whereas she unmistakably looks back at the same intertextual characters as her synonymous counterpart in the *Metamorphoses* (i.e. Ennius' Discordia, Lucretius' Mars, Vergil's Juno and Allecto, Propertius' Vesta), all of them being variant personifications of Empedoclean Strife, as Barchiesi puts it 'in Janus' version we have a far less grandiose picture of Juno: instead of throwing the door to the ground, she furtively removes its bars, and the epic quality of Saturnia is abruptly reduced by the low-key diction of the pentameter'.<sup>45</sup> At the opposite pole, instead of Venus, Janus is now granted the key role. This modification, which is not found in any other version of the myth before Ovid, is particularly significant.<sup>46</sup> One should not pass over the fact that in the *Fasti*—to quote Gee's words—'Vesta and Janus are an allegorical as well as a liturgical pair, representing between them the two aspects of a Stoicising cosmos, Vesta the earth, Janus the *mundus* encompassing it'.<sup>47</sup> Given the ambiguous identity of Propertius' Vesta, Ovid responds by tellingly opting for Janus, his Empedoclean god of peace, to repel *arma* by peaceful means, instead of his female counterpart, who is otherwise mostly prominent in this work. In order to achieve his goal, Janus states that he used a trick (*movi callidus artis opus*, 1.268): he threw sulphur into the channels of nearby fountains and then opened them, so that boiling waters repulsed the Sabines from their attack. As Green notes, while the words *movi... artis opus* associate the god with the poet, the adjective *callidus*, which is often used in comedy to characterize cunning slaves and in mime for adulterous women, endows the passage with comic undertones.<sup>48</sup> As a consequence, by means of his device, Janus deceives our expectations about a more dynamic intervention which would result in fighting, and brings in subtle elegiac wittiness.<sup>49</sup>

Taking into consideration the Neopythagorean/Empedoclean undertones of Vesta's behaviour, Ovid seems ready to glean further philosophical elements from

<sup>44</sup> Green (2004a) 123.

<sup>45</sup> Barchiesi (1991-1992) 15-16.

<sup>46</sup> Murgatroyd (2005) 255.

<sup>47</sup> Gee (2000) 118. A full discussion of Vesta's role in Ovid's *Fasti* is beyond the scope of this paper. For Vesta in Ovid's *Fasti* see Gee (2000) 92-125.

<sup>48</sup> Green (2004a) 126. The epithet *callidus* which modifies Janus' work is also used by Lucretius in his Book 6 when he apostrophizes Calliope (*callida musa*, *DRN* 6.93). Lucretius hints here at Empedocles' Muse and considers her the ideal combination of poetry and philosophy. Janus may well represent the Ovidian equivalent of Lucretius' Empedoclean Calliope. See Garani (2008).

<sup>49</sup> Murgatroyd (2005) 34.

Propertius' poem, so as to decipher Vesta's puzzle, this time from the elemental level. According to Varro's etymology of Venus, the goddess has been born out of the union of fire and water (*Igitur causa nascendi duplex: ignis et aqua. Ideo ea nuptiis in limine adhibentur, quod coniungit<ur> hic, et mas ignis, quod ibi semen, aqua femina, quod fetus ab eius humore, et horum vinctionis vis Venus / the conditions for procreation are two: fire and water. Thus these are used at the threshold in weddings, because there is union here. And fire is male, which the semen is in the other case, and the water is the female, because the embryo develops from her moisture, and the force that brings their *vinctio* "binding" is Venus, 'Love', LL 5.61).<sup>50</sup> This Neopythagorean/Empedoclean notion belongs to the 'theology of the philosophers'.<sup>51</sup> Taking this statement as our starting point, we could plausibly claim that, when Ovid innovates by combining the myth of Tarpeia with the aetiological explanation of Lautolae and sketches in this way the relationship between water and fire, he turns once again to Varro as his source and the latter's philosophizing etymology of Venus. In other words, by tracking down this elemental relationship in Propertius and projecting it back to Varro, Ovid may shed further light upon the role of Vesta. And so, in his turn, he presents us with his double commentary, which reflects and is also conditioned by the Varronian etymology of Venus.*

As has been observed, the presence of fire and water are dominant in Propertius' Tarpeia elegy. This should not be a surprise, given their pivotal role in the Vestal cult.<sup>52</sup> Not only do Vestal virgins tend the flame, but they have to carry water every day from a specific spring. Tarpeia shows her predisposition for water early in the elegy (*hunc Tarpeia deae fontem libarat / From this spring Tarpeia had taken a libation to the goddess, IV.4.15*). In line with this, she entertains the nymphs, i.e. the symbol of water, to protect Tattius (*saepe illa immeritae causata est omina lunae, / et sibi tingendas dixit in amne comas; / saepe tulit blandis argentea lilia nymphis, / Romula ne faciem laederet hasta Tati / Often she used the omens of the undeserving moon as an excuse, and said her hair must be washed in the river; often she offered silvery lilies to the compliant nymphs, with a prayer that Romulus's spear not harm Tattius's face, IV.4.23-6*). In the course of the poem the interaction between water and fire is intensified (IV.4.45-50):

*Pallados extinctos si quis mirabitur ignes,  
ignoscat: lacrimis spargitur ara meis.  
cras, ut rumor ait, tota potabitur urbe:  
tu cape spinosi rorida terga iugi.  
lubrica tota uia est et perfida: quippe latentes  
fallaci celat limite semper aquas.*

<sup>50</sup> Translation by Kent (1951). Cf. also Varro LL 5.63: *Poetae de Caelo quod semen igneum cecidisse dicunt in mare ac natam 'e spumis' Venerem, coniunctione ignis et humoris, quam habent vim significant esse Ve<ne>ris / The poets, in that they say that the fiery seed fell from the Sky into the sea and Venus was born "from the foam-masses," through the conjunction of fire and moisture, are indicating that the *vis* "force" which they have is that of Venus.*

<sup>51</sup> Green (2002) 79.

<sup>52</sup> For the role of fire and water in Vestal cult see Staples (1998) 148-51.





intertextual equivalents, i.e. Vergilian Venus and Juno, Vesta is the one who eventually *fallit* Tarpeia, this time by way of her transformation from goddess of elegiac love to agent of Empedoclean Strife. This radical twist points to Propertius'—so far disregarded—witty Callimachean interplay within the elegy.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the innovative generic amalgamation of elegy with philosophical elements points to the experimental Callimachean style that in fact pervades Book 4.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, once Vesta's Empedoclean function as the agent of Strife is disclosed and the catalytic impact of her intervention upon the political changes is underscored, the ostensibly strict dichotomy between patriotic shell and amatory content of the elegy, which is often insisted on by scholars, is obliterated. In line with this, Propertius is conceivably revealed as approving of violence such as this experienced in the course of civil wars as a means of political progress; and so at least in the elegy in question his patriotic aspirations are fulfilled.

This paper started as an exploration of Tarpeia's myth in Propertius and Ovid. Surprisingly, this exploration has resulted in tracking down different embodiments of Empedoclean Love and Strife, modified according to generic criteria. Within this framework, Propertius' place within the stemma of Empedocles' intertextual reception has been defined, and the impact that his intertextual embracing of philosophical elements had upon his aetiological plan has been discussed. At the same time, Ovid's double response, once in epic, once in elegiac—and thus self-inverting—terms, has been shown to form part of his multi-layered reception of Empedoclean ideas. By means of this innovative mixture of philosophical and playful elements within the broader framework of aetiological elegiac poetry, which was first found in Propertius, Ovid redefines in his turn the genre of elegy and gives it a new twist.

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<sup>57</sup> Pillinger (1969) 177, Miller (1982) 382. For a latent Callimachean presence in another aetiological elegy of Book 4 (IV.10) which has also been considered mostly un-Callimachean see Garani (2007b).

<sup>58</sup> Pillinger (1969) 174, 178. For a blending of different genres—this time elegy with epic—see Hercules' elegy (Propertius IV.9) with Warden (1982) 235.

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