TRACING *MEDULLA* AS A *LOCUS EROTICUS*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The subject of passionate love can mire even the most creative author in clichés. When we read the corpus of Greek and Latin love poems that span half a dozen centuries, from Sappho to Ovid, we quickly become accustomed to the conventional *topoi*, the "moon-in-June" scenarios of desire and frustration that survive to this day in popular song. This is not to say that love poets never invent anything new. Indeed, the best of them, working within the genre's boundaries, develop striking variations on familiar themes. But it is rare to find a really fresh image in the age-old discourse of love. Sappho and the creative team employed by Hallmark Cards seem to share a (very long-lived) Muse.

Love is often described in terms that are also applicable to other experiences, such as madness, war, or physical illness.[1] The physiology of eros shares some of its terms with biology or medical science: passion can affect the mind, nerves, pulse, or tongue. In this paper, I will discuss one such "biological" erotic image: "marrow," αἰών or μυελός in Greek, *medulla* in Latin. The marrow, physically remote and insensate, deep within the bone or cerebro-spinal cavity, is not as accessible an image to the modern reader as, for example, a fluttering heart, another *topos* widely used by ancient authors.[2] Why did poets choose to portray the marrow as a

1 For an excellent discussion of "love's figures and tropes," addressing the problematic issue of "metaphor" in erotic discourse, see Kennedy 1993.46–63. See also Lakoff and Johnson 1980.49.

2 Onians 1954.94–96 lists organs in Homeric epic that are said to feel or think: thus organs of the chest (θυμός, στῆθος, φρένες, πραπίδες, κῆρ, κραδίη, ἦτορ) are all considered to

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specific *locus* of erotic experience, and what does this choice tell us about ancient views of sexuality?

It will become clear in the course of my argument that, as far as we can tell from the surviving literature, the word was not always used with a primarily erotic connotation. I propose here to trace its semantic shifts in poetry. At first glance, it seems to be the exception that proves the rule: a new trope, extremely popular in the works of Catullus and his successors. Did the Latin poets "discover" an erotic image unexploited by their Greek literary models? I will demonstrate that while the erotic application may be understood as a "semantic stretch" of earlier non-erotic uses of the word in Greek epic,[3] "marrow" never appears in an explicitly erotic context in surviving archaic Greek poetry. We find a few scattered Hellenistic references to marrow as a *locus eroticus*, but the image suddenly becomes immensely popular in the works of the Latin love poets. How did the word become part of the physiology of eros, as it were?

I will explore two possible scenarios, not mutually exclusive: first, the idea that something new, a metaphor or a turn of phrase, could be the brilliant act of a single poetic authority—Theocritus or Catullus, for example, in a moment of "genius," suddenly inventing a novel way to write about passion; second, a possible non-literary influence, that of contemporary scientific theories of human sexuality, which may have inspired poets to expand their repertoire of stock erotic images to incorporate the newest trends and speculations. Such an overlap between literary and scientific domains, in the form of a term shared by love poets and medical/philosophical writers, might again offer us an insight into the different ways cultures represent eros. Eros ("love"? "sex"? "desire"?) has a remarkable ability to cross category boundaries. In our culture, sex (for lack of a better word) may be viewed clinically (by a medical doctor), spiritually or psychologically (by a rabbi or a therapist), romantically (in romantic

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be the seat of consciousness and intelligence, feeling and thought, while ψυχή is not. This changes with Pindar, who begins to allow ψυχή to be part of the waking consciousness and to feel emotions.

3 The Homeric epics are a storehouse for military metaphors of eroticism, as discussed in Rissman 1983. For the term "semantic stretch," see Lloyd 1987.174–75: "terms with a more or less obvious, more or less deliberate, semantic stretch . . . neither we nor the Greeks can avoid conceiving or grasping the imaginary with the aid of terms whose stretch reaches back to the perceptible." See also Lloyd 1990.14–38, on the problematic concept of "metaphor." There are still problems with framing my questions this way, since "semantic stretch" does not totally banish the specter of a point of origin, as pointed out to me by the anonymous referee for *Arethusa*.

fiction), or explicitly (in pornographic films). Each aspect of sex has its own vocabulary, customs, expectations, and rules; we do not expect to find the same terminology used in a Harlequin romance and a medical journal. But each erotic sphere tends to have some points of contact with the others, as eros bursts every boundary built to contain it. Did ancient authors borrow this particular erotic image from contemporary scientific discourse?[4] Or, to phrase the question differently, do references to marrow in both literary and medical contexts indicate a curiosity about sexuality common to both fields of interest?[5]

Let us begin by tracing instances of "marrow," both erotic and non-erotic, in the earliest texts surviving from the Greek world.[6] Throughout my survey I aim to avoid a simplistic division into literal and metaphorical applications. There is not necessarily one "normal" use of the word against which all the other usages are measured and found to be "secondary," "figurative," or "metaphorical."[7] As Duncan Kennedy puts it, "the very distinction that is drawn between the 'literal' and the 'metaphorical' uses of a word provides, by virtue of being largely unquestioned, a framework within which a hierarchy of values and assumptions can be articulated."[8] Thus my own surprise at the use of "marrow" as an erotic image may reveal an assumption on my part that passion and medical science are incompatible spheres in the context of the literary representation of love. But since it is questionable whether there ever can be a set of terms whose exclusive or "proper" function is to describe eros, both we and the Greeks find ourselves speaking of love with the aid of terms whose "semantic stretch" reaches back to the perceptible, i.e., in this case, a physical substance. Particularly in the case of the workings of the heart and

4 My argument inevitably implies a certain privileging of the term as primarily appropriate to the medical arena, then later "borrowed" and applied secondarily to the erotic sphere.

5 In a related discussion, Edwards 1993.85–86 improves Peter Brown's suggestion that medical sources can "explain" literary examples, by arguing that "rather than see this as an explanation, it is more plausible to view the claims made by medical writers as a parallel manifestation of the commonly held view [that excessive indulgence in sex diminished a man's potency in other respects]." In my argument, the medical sources are substantially earlier in date than the literary examples which seem to reflect them, so I am not as confident about parallelism rather than influence.

6 I will not deal in depth with the richest source of examples of μυελός in Greek prose writers, namely the medical writers. A computer-assisted word search shows Galen with 274 references, then Aetius Amidenus (92), the Hippiatrica (82), Oribasius (72), and Hippocrates and the Hippocratic corpus (48).

7 Kennedy 1993.52–54. See also Padel 1992.9.

8 Kennedy 1993.54.

mind, which cannot be observed and analyzed, any account must be framed in some sort of metaphorical language.[9]

A final caution before proceeding: although my survey appears chronologically or historically based, moving from Homer to Ovid, I do not mean to imply that the word itself develops in a straight line from "primitive" to complex, from concrete to abstract. Ruth Padel argues convincingly that all words for bodily liquids and innards are multiple and fluid; one of her many examples is μένος, which is inextricably both physical and emotional.[10] Similarly, with the word "marrow," there will always be a "somatic tinge"[11] or physical reference lurking behind what we see as metaphorical or abstract, and there will always already be the potential for abstraction even in Homer's use of the word, as we shall see shortly. So, for lack of a better paradigm, and realizing that even this division reveals certain awkward ideological assumptions, my distinctions will take the form of eroticized vs. non-eroticized uses of "marrow," rather than the misleading dichotomy of literal and metaphorical.

II. THE GREEK LITERARY TRADITIONS

References to both bones and marrow in early Greek poetry occur frequently in descriptions of violence and human death. Bone and spinal marrow are viewed as the quintessential "blood and guts" of a man. Homer speaks thus of a fallen warrior: "his life has left him, his marrow (αἰών) will rot" (*Il.* 19.27); elsewhere marrow (μυελός) spurts from the spine of a corpse (*Il.* 20.482), and the Cyclops gulps down two victims, crunching their marrowy bones (*Od.* 9.293: ὀστέα μυελόεντα). Pindar also speaks of marrow (αἰών) violently crushed from the bones of an enemy (fr. 111.5). The acquisition and consumption of animal marrow, on the other hand, while still rooted in the context of violence and sacrifice, offer a more positive picture, closely connected to the pleasures of eating and celebrating. Animal marrow is served as a delicacy at epic feasts (*Il.* 22.501). Even when not prepared for a feast, the retrieval of animal marrow implies something beneficial for both men and gods: in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, Hermes pierces the marrow of Herakles' cattle as he sacrifices the meat to the gods (119), and scoops out the marrow of a turtle to make his lyre (42).

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9 This is discussed in Padel 1992.34.
10 Padel 1992.26.
11 Padel's term, see Padel 1992.36.

These examples from hexameter poetry suggest that references to marrow in archaic epic literature are restricted to the physical substance itself. Marrow at this stage is closely associated with the life force and its counterpart, violent death, of both man and animal. Only two passages in Homer suggest any sort of semantically "stretched" use of the word, in this case probably derived from the idea of animal marrow as a rich source of fat or food: thus barley meal is referred to as the μυελὸν ἀνδρῶν, the "mainstay of human life" (*Od*. 2.290, 20.108). For more elaborate uses we must turn to lyric poetry.

The language of erotic experience in archaic Greek poetry has been described as a form of violent expropriation, an attack on a person's bodily substance or mental integrity.[12] Common terms used to describe love's impact on the body include those also applicable to instances of war, disease, and dissolution, as well as such acts of physical assault as piercing, burning, and stealing. Thus in Archilochus, for example, eros steals away the lover's wits (fr. 112), Anacreon's lover is beaten and doused (fr. 413), and Sappho (fr. 31) portrays a body dissolving into an agitated heart, a broken tongue, and alternating sensations of fire and ice. Even the more baroque erotic images of Hellenistic poetry replicate this focus on bodily attack and bloodshed: Theocritus' Simaetha asks in despair "Oh pitiless Eros, why have you gulped down all the dark blood from my body, clinging to me like a leech from the swamps?" (*Id*. 2.55–56).[13]

To describe the feeling of eros burrowing deep inside the body, draining it of its strength, authors usually select soft targets: the heart, lungs, wits, or guts. Sappho's tender φρένες are gnawed (96.17), Alcman's heart (καρδία) is on fire (59a.2).[14] An exception is Archilochus who, in forming his lyric response to a conventional epic scene, transfers military sensibility to the erotic sphere, and depicts a lover in agony, pain shooting through his bones (fr. 104.1–3 Campbell):

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12 Carson 1986.32–41. Carson interprets this attitude towards eros as a development of the creation myth of Aphrodite reported by Hesiod (*Theog*. 189–200), in which the goddess was born from the foam surrounding Ouranos' severed genitals: "love does not happen without loss of vital self" (32).

13 The verb used of "drinking" blood here, πίνειν, has something of the grotesqueness of Theocritus' "eating" (ἐσθίειν), used of the marrow in *Id*. 30 and discussed later in this paper.

14 I return later to the importance of "gnawing" as an action performed on an internal organ, when the marrow is "gnawed" in an erotic context. Padel 1992.12–48, 119–20 discusses innards, eating, and biting images.

δύστηνος ἔγκειμαι πόθωι
ἄψυχος, χαλεπῆισι θεῶν ὀδύνηισιν ἔκητι
πεπαρμένος δι᾽ ὀστέων.

I lie here wretched, lifeless with desire,
pierced through the bones
with harsh pains sent by the gods.

If the single word "desire" were omitted, the reader might assume the poetic *ego* to be suffering from a physical wounding, the result of a battle. Being shot through with pain (by a spear, arrow, etc.) is a common enough occurrence in epic catalogues of carnage (e.g., *Il.* 5.399: ὀδύνῃσι πεπαρμένος), but it soon becomes obvious that these arrows have been shot by not just any god (or mortal, for that matter). Eros is the cause of the narrator's wretchedness, his pain, his sense of helplessness; eros is experienced here as a sort of death. The poet writes of being "pierced through the bones . . ." But at a deeper level of interiority than the bone lies the marrow. Archilochus does not mention the marrow because the word is not yet part of his erotic discourse.[15]

In the classical era, the three tragedians each use the word μυελός only once in their extant plays, but with very different emphases. Aeschylus equates marrow with youthful vigor and depicts the substance as something that can move inside the body, almost as if it were a fast-beating heart: "the young marrow leaps up within the chest" (*Ag*. 76); Sophocles uses the word of cerebral marrow as Herakles hurls Lichas to his gory death: "the white marrow spattered from his hair together with blood as his head split open" (*Trach*. 781–82).[16] Euripides, however, comes closest to hinting at erotic connotations. In the *Hippolytus*, the nurse is bewildered and upset by Phaedra's strange illness; since she is so fond of her, she finds it extremely hard to watch Phaedra suffer. Accordingly, in her moralizing way, she advises moderation in emotion and φιλία, so that no person should have to feel deeply the pain of another (*Hipp*. 253–57):[17]

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15 Cf. Onians 1954.118 note 9, who uses this passage of Archilochus as an example of "love in the marrow," implying that "through the bones" is simply an equivalent expression. I disagree: Archilochus says exactly what he means, omitting any explicit reference to marrow.

16 There is a fascinating note on this passage in Athenaeus *Deipn.* 2.72.10–12, 26–27 (Teubner = 2.66a–c Loeb), explaining that Sophocles uses μυελός euphemistically instead of ἐγκέφαλον because the word for brains was considered sacred, not to be spoken (much less eaten—this discussion occurs in a section on "pigs' brains").

17 I use the recent text and commentary of Halleran 1995.

χρῆν γὰρ μετρίας εἰς ἀλλήλους
φιλίας θνητοὺς ἀνακίρνασθαι
καὶ μὴ πρὸς ἄκρον μυελὸν ψυχῆς,
εὔλυτα δ᾽ εἶναι στέργηθρα φρενῶν
ἀπό τ᾽ ὦσασθαι καὶ ξυντεῖναι.

We mortals should mix with one another
in moderate φιλία (friendship/love)
and not let it reach the extreme marrow of the soul,
but the affections of the φρένες (heart/mind) should be
easily loosened,
both to push aside and to pull in tight.

Euripides presents the nurse as a fount of conventional wisdom, advising both herself and her charge not to let feelings go too deep. He uses "marrow" here to mean "innermost part." The physical "marrow" is curiously juxtaposed with the ephemeral (and presumably marrowless) "soul," and further complicated by the term ἄκρον, which typically refers to what is topmost or outermost rather than innermost, as it must be in this case.[18] The whole phrase might be translated in our terms "deep inside your heart"; in fact, Euripides does use the word "heart" (φρένες) in the very next line, speaking of the "affections of the heart," which we might paraphrase as "feelings" or "emotions." But the point is that Euripides chooses the word "marrow" for this particular context, and the context (as the nurse may suspect but does not yet fully understand) is one of uncontrollable passion. The entire passage becomes eroticized in the knowing audience's mind; we realize that Phaedra is experiencing destructive eros deep inside her soul, "metaphorically" (since soul is not a corporeal object with the physical attributes of flesh, blood, and bone) in its very marrow.[19]

Turning to the Hellenistic poets, we find four references to μυελός, two non-erotic and two erotic. The word means "pith" or "core" when Crinagoras speaks of the "yellow marrow of a pinecone" as a choice

18 See Halleran 1995.171 and Barrett 1964.208–09: "here 'marrow' and 'surface' are incompatible, and no-one could think of anything but 'extreme.' (ἄκρος in its literal use always of a surface or extremity; it is absurd to allege, as L.S. 1.3, that we have here a unique 'inmost', the exact opposite of the normal meaning.)"

19 Onians 1954.118 quotes this passage to argue that the view that ψυχή was rooted in the marrow was not "mere philosophical doctrine" but rather popular opinion.

morsel during a rustic feast of Pan (*AP* 6.232.2). There is irony here as well, of course, since, as discussed above, animal marrow was conventionally the choicest morsel at a feast. Theocritus uses the word without as obvious a nod to its literal meaning when he refers to the "very marrow of Sicily," i.e., the best part of the island (*Id*. 28.18).

Theocritus and the *Greek Anthology* are also the sources for two early examples of μυελός as a *locus eroticus*. In the *Greek Anthology*, Dioscorides claims that Eros has formed a boy's rump to be "marrow-like" (*AP* 12.37.1–3).

> Πυγὴν Σωσάρχοιο διέπλασεν Ἀμφιπολίτεω
> μυελίνην παίζων ὁ βροτολοιγὸς Ἔρως
> Ζῆνα θέλων ἐρεθίξαι . . .
>
> Love, the man-slayer, playfully modeled marrowy
> the rump of Sosarchos from Amphipolis,
> wanting to irritate Zeus . . .

This passage uses marrow to denote something desirable, whatever that may be in its original cultural context: delicate, smooth, sensual, moist? The phrase may recall the status of animal marrow as a delicacy, but it places it in an unmistakably erotic context. The modern lover might use the phrase "a real dish" (somewhat old-fashioned), or "good enough to eat," and I suspect that something of the casual humor (or is it vulgarity?) of the modern formulations lurks also in the ancient lines. Whereas so far we have come across examples of the word used metaphorically but not erotically, Dioscorides here offers us the unusual instance of "marrow" used erotically but non-metaphorically.

Even more explicit is a passage in Theocritus (*Id*. 30.20–22):[20]

> τὸ δ' αὖτε γλυκέρας ἄνθεμον ἄβας πεδ' ὐμαλίκων
> μένει. τῷ δ' ὁ πόθος καὶ τὸν ἔσω μύελον ἐσθίει
> ὀμμιμνασκομένῳ, πόλλα δ' ὄραι νύκτος ἐνύπνια . . .

20 The text is that of Gow 1952. The lines are corrupt and the meaning somewhat uncertain, but line 21 is clear enough for our purposes.

> The flower of the boy's sweet youth remains among his peers,
> but the lover is prey to memories and desire feeds on even his [the lover's] innermost marrow,
> and he has many dreams at night . . .

Theocritus describes the vivid imagination of a lover who dreams of his beloved at night and thinks he feels desire eating away his innermost marrow, sapping his strength as if he were a sacrificial victim (but at the altar of love . . .). The juxtaposition of marrow as a site of erotic experience and as the object of the verb ἐσθίω (to "devour" or "feed on") is quite remarkable. The image of the eating of marrow pulls the reader back into the semantic field of animal sacrifice, a literal feasting on the substance itself. Marrow is not used specifically metaphorically here, but an overall metaphorical reading wins out when we realize that desire, πόθος, is doing the feasting, and its object is human marrow, the erotic core of the lover. This collocation of the literal and the metaphoric, the potentially grotesque but effectively sensual, will be taken up and developed by Catullus and his successors.

If we were looking for a first instance of μυελός as a *locus eroticus*, this would be it. The shout of *eureka* would have to be tempered by the suspicion that the "Theocritus" of *Idyll* 30 may not be who we think he is, so that the great "inventor" can only be labelled "anonymous" or "in the school of . . ." Yet this is closer to the truth, anyway. Similes, metaphors, or any literary turn of phrase rarely can be traced back to one definitive moment in a single author's oeuvre. Let me emphasize again that I am not searching for an "origin" for the erotic application of μυελός, but rather tracing semiotic shifts in its usage. "Theocritus" may provide a convenient turning point in the history of the word, but we must acknowledge the importance of countless missing lines and authors, crucial but unprovable links in the chain. The phrase may also have circulated orally for some time before it made its way into literature, and not just any literature, but canonical, safely transmitted literature. Not until Catullus can the phrase be labelled a cliché.

We can easily imagine how a vivid metaphor or simile gets picked up by admiring ears (or eyes) and passed on through texts; authors remember an ingenious turn of phrase or allude directly to an earlier author's images, particularly in the convention-bound genre of love poetry. But can we even speculate on the circumstances surrounding its entrance

into the public domain? A glance outside the canon, outside poetry, to another repository of cultural knowledge, may inform our discussion.

III. SEXUALITY, SCIENCE, AND SUPERSTITIONS

Let us consider briefly the scientific information available at this time which may have inspired the poets to connect marrow with passion or sexual desire.[21] In the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, several models existed to explain the formation and emission of seed (σπέρμα).[22] Three of the best known were the haematogenous, the pangenetic, and the encephalogenetic or myelogenetic.

According to the first theory, championed by Aristotle, sperm is formed in the blood through a process of concoction; in other words, human seed is a kind of surplus or residue of blood. Aristotle describes such a process of concoction in *On the Generation of Animals* (721a26–727b30).[23] Food passes into the stomach where it is liquefied and then passed on to the heart, which, in turn, is the site of a further transformation of the nutrients into blood. Since more blood than is needed for the body's healthy functioning is produced in this way, the excess endures yet another stage of concoction and turns into various useful fluids: menstrual blood, mother's milk, and semen.

The second theory of seed production, the pangenetic, holds that seed originates not in one particular element of the body, but rather in all parts. In the Hippocratic treatise *On the Sacred Disease*, we read that "seed comes from everywhere in the body—sound seed from the sound parts, diseased seed from the diseased parts."[24] The late fifth- or early fourth-century author of the Hippocratic work *On Seed* begins his argument with a clear pangenetic assertion: "the sperm of the human male comes from all the fluid in the body."[25] Aristotle, in debunking the pangenetic theory,

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21 I readily acknowledge that ancient medicine is well beyond my expertise, but I hope not to misrepresent the sources in my argument.

22 See von Staden 1989.288–92 and Lloyd 1983.86–94; my discussion here owes much to their analyses. I was unable to consult the classic work of Lesky 1950.

23 A useful translation is that of A. Platt in Barnes 1984.

24 Hp. *On the Sacred Disease*, Chapter 5 (=E. Littré 1962.VI 352–97); also translated in Lloyd 1978.237–51.

25 I. M. Lonie, trans., in Lloyd 1978.317; see also the beginning of section 3, "sperm is secreted from the whole body" (319). I have not been able to consult the translation, also by Lonie, in Lonie 1981.

claims that Empedocles held this view; Praxagoras and Democritus also appear to have been believers.[26]

But the theory that has the greatest relevance for this paper is that seed originates in or is part of the brain or the cerebro-spinal marrow (the encephalogenetic or myelogenetic theory).[27] This is clearly the opinion of the Pythagorean who wrote τὸ δὲ σπέρμα εἶναι σταγόνα ἐγκεφάλου ("*sperma* is a drop dripping from the brain").[28] Alcmaeon of Croton accepted the critical role of marrow in the generation of seed, but did not believe it was the exclusive source; he also included flesh and fat as its sources, although he agreed that seed gathered primarily in the spinal marrow and the head.[29] A concurrent belief about the workings of the vascular system held that seed was transported from the head past the ears and neck down the spine to the genitals. This seems to be the opinion of the author of *On Seed* when he writes that χωρέει γὰρ τὸ πλεῖστον τοῦ γόνου ἀπὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς παρὰ τὰ οὔατα εἰς τὸν νωτιαῖον μυελόν ("the greatest amount of seed comes from the head along the ears into the spinal marrow").[30] Thus even a pangeneticist agrees that the spinal marrow is critical for the transportation of seed, whatever its origins.

Plato's *Timaeus* reflects the encephalogenetic theory, agreeing that the brain and marrow play a crucial role in the formation and transportation

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26 Aristotle *De Gen. Anim.* 722b8; Democr. A 141 (=Diels-Kranz 1951–52.II 123.32), B 124 (=Diels-Kranz 1951–52.II 167.20). See Lloyd 1983.88, who also cautions that, while there appears to have been much discussion in the Presocratic philosophers about the pangenetic model, we do not have enough original material to evaluate it properly.

27 The same word (μυελός) was applied to the brain and its fluid contents, which are a continuation of the spinal marrow and usually considered one with it.

28 Diog. Laert. 8.24 (=Diels-Kranz 1951–52.I 450.2: "Pythagoreische Schule" B1a[28]), quoted in von Staden 1989.288. The myelogenetic view is also represented by Hippon (Diels-Kranz 1951–52.A 12 [=I 386.35]).

29 For the relevant fragments of Alcmaeon of Croton, see Diels-Kranz 1951–52.I 210–15, and esp. A 13 (=I 213.28).

30 Hp. *On Seed* (or *On Generation*) ch. 2, in Littré 1962.VII 472. See also in the same work, chapter 1: "this fluid [i.e., sperm] is diffused from the brain into the loins and the whole body, but in particular into the spinal marrow" (Lloyd 1978.317). Pliny *NH* 11.67.178 writes of lions, wolves, and hyenas that the nape, spine, and loins are all one connected set of vertebrae and that the "marrow passes down from the brain through the orifices in the vertebrae." As to the presence in the same Hippocratic work of two distinct theories, see von Staden 1989.289: "It is, however, characteristic of the agon between the old and the new, also within the Hippocratic Corpus, that both the archaic, encephalogenetic view and the newer, pangenetic view of seed are found in one and the same Hippocratic work" (speaking of *On Airs, Waters, and Places*).

of seed.[31] This dialogue argues, among other things, that the soul is not enclosed by organs in the chest cavity (e.g., thorax or abdomen), as Homer seems to believe, but rather in the marrow; more specifically, the divine part of the soul lives in the most divine part of the body's marrow, i.e., in the marrow of the head (ἐγκέφαλος). Plato identifies spinal marrow as the universal seed-stuff (πανσπερμία) for every mortal thing (73c1–2);[32] this seed-stuff has been formed into organs capable of receiving different kinds of soul. At one end of the spine, the marrow is shaped like a globe—this is the brain, which holds the immortal part of the soul (73d). Plato, later in the dialogue, labels this part the "spermatic" or "generative marrow" (77d4: γόνιμος μυελός) and describes the process of the emission of sperm as follows (91a7–b4):

> εἰς τὸν ἐκ τῆς κεφαλῆς κατὰ τὸν αὐχένα καὶ διὰ τῆς ῥάχεως μυελὸν συμπεπηγότα, ὃν δὴ σπέρμα ἐν τοῖς πρόσθεν λόγοις εἴπομεν. ὁ δὲ, ἅτ᾽ ἔμψυχος ὢν καὶ λαβὼν ἀναπνοήν, τοῦθ᾽ ἥπερ ἀνέπνευσεν, τῆς ἐκροῆς ζωτικὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἐμποιήσας αὐτῷ, τοῦ γεννᾶν ἔρωτα ἀπετέλεσεν.
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> [It comes] from the head, down along the neck, through the spine, and into the condensed [or compact, forming a connected line] marrow, which we called "seed" in our previous discussion [73c, 74a8, 86c]. And the marrow, since it is animate and has been given an outlet, has endowed the part where the outlet exists with a love for generating, by implanting therein a strong desire for emission.

Plato had just previously (89d–90d) discussed a higher form of eros, the striving for divine wisdom and immortality; this "higher" eros finds its home in the brain at the tip of the spinal column, in the cerebral marrow. Here he turns to the more concrete role of the spinal marrow in generation. Marrow as seed maintains the immortality of the species over

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31 See von Staden 1989.288 note 168.

32 "The meaning here is simply that molecules of all the 'roots' are present in the μυελός, not that the μυελός alone supplies *all* the materials required for the construction of the rest of the body." So Taylor 1928.522.

time as life is transmitted from one human to another; this passage describes how the seed is given an outlet in the male body and how the male sexual organ is endowed with, as Cornford charmingly translates it, "a lively appetite for egress."[33]

We are also told that when the marrow is diseased because of an excess or a deficiency of a particular element, a man's sexual life is directly affected (86c3–7):

> τὸ δὲ σπέρμα ὅτῳ πολὺ καὶ ῥυῶδες περὶ τὸν μυελὸν γίγνεται καὶ καθαπερεὶ δένδρον πολυκαρπότερον τοῦ συμμέτρου πεφυκὸς ᾖ, πολλὰς μὲν καθ᾽ ἕκαστον ὠδῖνας, πολλὰς δ᾽ ἡδονὰς κτώμενος ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις . . .
>
> When man's seed grows to abundant volume in his marrow, as if it were a tree overburdened beyond measure with fruit, he brings on himself repeatedly many pains and many pleasures owing to his desires . . .

The comparison of excessive seed in the marrow to a tree overburdened with fruit suggests a parallel heaviness and desire for release on the part of the body. A man with a diseased marrow becomes uncontrolled sexually. Plato tells us that while such a man is thought to act badly deliberately, rather than just be sick, this lack of sexual self-control is really an illness, a disease of the soul, caused by a physical imbalance. Thus Plato locates the male sexual urge and sexual pathology in the marrow itself: a healthy marrow is soft and moist (81b8–c2), while an old or diseased marrow is fragile (81d4–e1), shaken with fever (85e4–9), or overburdened with seed.[34]

Plato goes into some detail about human sexual urges and repeats this information later in the dialogue (91c1–10). He also returns to the image of fruit on a tree to talk about sexual release. Sex is compared explicitly to fruit gathering (91c7–d1: οἷον ἀπὸ δένδρων καρπὸν καταδρέψαντες), as men sow tiny creatures in the female womb. But when

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33 Cornford 1960.356.

34 Elsewhere we read of "dried up" marrow or flesh as an image of old age or weakness: Homer *Od*. 13.430ff., Archilochus fr. 209 Tarditi, Aristotle *De Long. et Brev. Vit.* 466a17–23. On the equation of the vital sap of plants and man, see Onians 1954.219–22. Propertius will pick up this image in an erotic context, as discussed below.

he talks in the same passage of female sexual desire, just as he focused his description of sexual organs on the male example, so he shifts his emphasis in this section from desire to reproductive function. Men are the helpless victims of lustful penises; women become "hysterical" when their wombs are left "without fruit beyond the proper season" (91c3: ἄκαρπον παρὰ τὴν ὥραν).

Plato talks of spermatic marrow only with reference to the male, while the woman's role in reproduction is limited to the possession of a womb. Granted, this womb is described as a "living creature within them with a desire for child-bearing" (91c2), but other than wandering upwards and attempting to suffocate its owner, the womb remains a reactive rather than an active partner in procreation. Plato (91c7) does present both male and female desires (the male ἔρως [τοῦ γεννᾶν] and the female ἐπιθυμία [τῆς παιδοποιΐας]) cooperating, but he clearly views the contribution of the male as more important.

Questions about the part played by the two sexes in procreation were of great interest to ancient scientists and medical writers; they were particularly curious not only about the creation of seed (i.e., whether it was secreted from all parts of the body or just some parts and, if some, then which parts), but also whether the female contributed seed.[35] In the *Timaeus*, Plato seems to reject the idea that seed comes from both parents. His analogies to fruit trees and farming (91d) suggest the view that all the material for the child's body comes from the father, while the mother serves merely as a receptacle with nutrients for the embryo's growth. Aristotle (*De Gen. Anim.* 727a26–30) explicitly denies the woman seed (727a27): φανερὸν ὅτι τὸ θῆλυ οὐ συμβάλλεται σπέρμα εἰς τὴν γένεσιν ("it is plain that the female does not contribute semen to the generation of offspring").[36] We saw above that he believed that excess blood became semen in the man, but menstrual blood or milk in the woman, so, in the case of a pregnant woman, her superfluous blood would offer nourishment to the body of the offspring. Plato and Aristotle's line of argument is most familiar to us from the sophistic defense of Orestes in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* 658ff., where Athena argues that the mother is no blood kin to her child.

A number of Presocratic and later authors (among others, Parmenides, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Alcmaeon, Pythagoras, Democritus,

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35 On this question, see Taylor 1928.636–38 and Lloyd 1983.86–94.
36 Barnes 1984.1129.

and Epicurus) are reported in secondary sources to have believed otherwise.[37] Aristotle (*De Gen. Anim*. 722b11 = Emped. fr. 63 DK) reports that Empedocles thought that the female and the male both contributed seed. The author of *On Seed* held the same opinion. Much of his argument concerns the sex of the embryo, which he believes results from the particular balance (with respect to both strength and quantity) of the male and female "spermatic" contributions. He speaks of seed from both partners, and sums up his argument by stating:[38] οὕτως ὁ λόγος ἐρέει καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα ἔχειν καὶ θῆλυν γόνον καὶ ἄρσενα, "This discourse shows that both man and woman have male and female sperm." I have introduced this information on procreation to emphasize that, for the most part (excluding some Presocratics and the author of *On Seed*), fifth- and particularly fourth-century Greek authors saw no role for seed or marrow in female sexuality, much less any role for active desire on the part of the woman. This will become interesting later when we consider the frequency with which the image of marrow as a *locus eroticus*, limited in most scientific writers to discussions of male sexuality, surfaces in literature with reference to the erotic response of women.

To return to our argument about the source of human generation, the encephalogenetic or myelogenetic theory, which locates the origin of human seed in the cerebral or spinal marrow, may have its early sources in the notion, not unique to Greco-Roman antiquity, that the head (or brain) was the seat of all vital functions and thus the supreme organ of the human body.[39] Evidence of this notion exists in archaic Greek literature, when a person's sexual power and life force are equated with precious fluid located in the head (or knees). Hesiod writes of the dog days of summer, when "women are most wanton and men most feeble [i.e., impotent] because Sirius dries up the head and knees" (*WD* 586–87), and Alcaeus concurs that "women are at their worst and men weakest because Sirius parches the head and knees" (fr. 347.6–8). Thus it appears that, for the Greeks, the generative power of man was located in the head, not just in scientific treatises, but in literature and myth as well. Some would explain a variety of head-births in this way: e.g., Athena springing from Zeus' head or Pegasus from Medusa's.

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37 This is discussed in Lloyd 1983.87.

38 Littré 1962.478; for more quotations from this treatise and similar opinions from *On Regimen*, see Lloyd 1983.88–94.

39 See Onians 1954.96–98 on the head as the seat of life, considered holy, or in a sense equivalent to the person him- or herself.

The head of Orpheus, which continued to sing and prophesy after his decapitation, may be interpreted as further proof of the importance of the head: as long as it remained whole, it contained a man's life.

The concept of the head or, more specifically, the μυελός of the brain as the source of semen turns out to be fairly common in the belief systems of many cultures. According to Weston La Barre, the belief is widespread and of great antiquity (La Barre 1984). La Barre makes two major points: first, that the superstition that the brain was the major repository of generative material, i.e., semen, is connected to the issue of sexual continence as a goal in life, since semen is viewed as existing in a finite supply and every emission marks one step closer to death; second, that the superstition also led to the custom of head hunting, since one could add to one's store of brain marrow by eating other people's brains thereby bolstering overall tribal power and fertility. While this may sound all quite remote from Greco-Roman practices, La Barre does offer some curious and telling evidence from historical times: he quotes a number of ancient Greek and Latin sources for the custom of head hunting among the Celts (third century BCE on) and documents a skull from Pompeii inscribed "drink and you shall live many years,"[40] although it is unclear to me whether this latter example alludes to drinking brains or wine.

It is safe to say that some Greeks and Romans, at some times in their history, did share certain of the assumptions catalogued in La Barre: the belief that seed resided in the brain, that sexual continence saved one's life or energy (since the supply of seminal fluid was concrete and limited), that aging was evidenced by a drying up of vital juices. We can trace these beliefs in the medical and philosophical literature discussed above, as well as in less technical writings. So, for example, we can read epic and lyric references to sex as "limb-loosening" (e.g., Hesiod *Theog*. 910) as examples of the belief that sex was a sort of "death." Lucretius, in his tirade on passionate love, speaks of it as a *malum* (4.1119), a disease that consumes one's strength and causes lovers to waste away with their secret wounds (4.1119–21). Michel Foucault, in his *Histoire de la sexualité*, catalogues a number of ancient authors who appear to express anxiety or suspicion about sexual activity and concludes that sexual pleasure was often viewed as harmful or enfeebling to the body.[41] He reminds us of the overall positive

40 La Barre 1984.16–18, 22–23. I disagree with La Barre's bizarre interpretation of male homosexuality in ancient Greece, in which "the qualities of arete and character in a man's psyche are thus literally and materially given to the boy in the man's muelos (semen)" (79).

41 Foucault 1984.133–40.

valorization of sex for the ancient Greeks, but points out a certain *inquiétude* about the act itself.[42]

One of the most interesting aspects of La Barre's survey is his observation of the longevity of the superstition. Spenser, in *The Faerie Queen* 1.4.26, writes of lechery "that rots the marrow and consumes the brain." Shakespeare was very fond of the image: his marrows burn, are spent, and are even eaten in the frenzy of love:

> spending his manly marrow in her arms,
> which should sustain the bound and high curvet
> of Mars' fiery steed
> *All's Well That Ends Well* 2.3.284

> my flesh is soft and plump, my marrow burning
> *Venus and Adonis* 192

> the marrow-eating sickness [love]
> *Venus and Adonis* 741–42

To return to the Greco-Roman context, I would suggest that the ongoing scientific and philosophical debates on these theories, as well as general popular belief that the brain was the repository for semen, inspired Hellenistic and Roman poets to locate the movements of erotic passion in the marrow as well as in the (more conventional, more familiar) heart or soul. Our culture separates medical terms from "layman's" terms by putting them in obscure technical language or even leaving them in their Greek or Latin forms. In antiquity, the two spheres were less distinct and the inverse was often true: medical terms were derived from everyday language, especially in early Greek medicine. Geoffrey Lloyd offers some instructive examples: the generic word for fever, πυρετός, may simply mean fire, like πῦρ in Homer.[43] Other words for diseases or body parts appear inherently metaphorical: thus the retina was called "the net-like membrane" in Greek, but also called on occasion "the spider's-web-like one."[44] We should be less surprised, then, at the fluidity of boundaries between medical and literary terms, and at the appearance of what seem to be medical or technical data in poetic contexts.

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42 Foucault 1984.141.
43 Lloyd 1987.203.
44 Lloyd 1987.207.

IV. THE LATIN LITERARY TRADITIONS

Μυελός becomes *medulla* in the Latin authors and, as the examples proliferate, it becomes more and more difficult to find instances of the word used without a hint of erotic or "metaphoric" overtones. In most of the examples to follow, marrow, even when used primarily non-metaphorically, seems implicated in a compound image that is in part metaphorical. It is as if once "stretched," the word can no longer be contained by a single application, but points instead in multiple directions. It may be helpful here to quote George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who speak of "literal expressions structured by metaphorical concepts."[45] A phrase such as "we will take our chances," which equates life with a game of chance or gambling, would not be considered a metaphorical statement but rather everyday language appropriate to the given situation; but that particular way of talking about, conceiving, and experiencing the situation is metaphorically structured.[46] We will see that many of the Latin examples to follow are similarly "metaphorically structured."

As was the case with Homer, many references to *medulla* in Latin literature occur in the context of violence (in combination with bones) or animal sacrifice: thus Ovid reintroduces the Cyclops, crunching bones full of white marrow (*Met.* 14.208: *cum albis ossa medullis*). Ovid also transmits the curious superstition that the spinal marrow of a corpse metamorphoses in due course into a snake (*Met*. 15.390).[47] But when Ovid (*Ars Am.* 3.215: the marrow of a deer) and Horace (*Ep*. 5.37–38: Canidia grinds up the dried liver and marrow of a boy) discuss recipes for an aphrodisiac manufactured from animal or human marrow, the reader suspects that, although used to refer to the physical substance itself, the word may already be connected in the popular imagination with eros.

Beyond these examples of actual bone marrow, we find that, as in the Greek, the word is stretched to denote the "inner core" of a person and therefore also that person's intimate "feelings." Plautus applies it to "vitals": at *Stich*. 340, he writes "exhaustion has drunk up my marrow / . . . but hunger has taken up the marrow of my stomach."[48] At *Truc*. 439, the word

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45 Lakoff and Johnson 1980.51.

46 Lakoff and Johnson 1980.51.

47 This belief is mentioned also in Aelian *De Nat. Anim*. 1.51, Pliny *NH* 10.86.188, and Plutarch *Vit. Cleom*. 39.

48 See also Seneca *Ep*. 94.6: hunger grips his marrow.

refers to "feelings": "she has opened up her inmost thoughts (*medullitus*) to me." But this last example, and the one to follow, point out again how impossible it is to separate the literal from the metaphoric or from the erotic: at *Most*. 243, the young lover boasts of his beloved that "she loves me with all her marrow (*medullitus*)." The meaning of "core" or "feelings" rubs shoulders with the hint that the marrow is specifically the site in which the beloved actually feels the emotion.[49]

Lucretius speaks of the emotions, whether anger or *voluptas*, finding their way into a person's body in a clear physical progression from blood to guts to bones and their marrow (3.249–51):

> concutitur sanguis, tum viscera persentiscunt
> omnia, postremis datur ossibus atque medullis
> sive voluptas est sive est contrarius ardor.
>
> The blood receives the shock, then all the guts begin to feel it,
> and finally the emotion reaches the bones and the marrow,
> whether it is love or the opposite passion.

In this formulation, the personified bones and marrow can feel (*persentiscunt*) emotions along with the guts (*viscera*).[50] While the word is used specifically of the physical substance, it is clear that Lucretius imagines, as does Plautus above, that the *medullae* generally are an appropriate *locus* for passionate feelings.

Cicero offers a comparable range of nuances: he uses *medulla* of the actual innermost organ of the body (*Tusc*. 4.24.5, 5.27.6), of the essence of something (*Brut*. 59.4, *Sen*. 50.11), and finally of his true emotions (*Phil*.

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49 See also the lines of Plautus transmitted by Marcus Aurelius in a letter to Fronto, in which Plautus is said to have written "not only has the rain of love drenched her dress with its thunder-drops, but soaked into her very marrow" (*ut Plautus ait, "amoris imber grandibus guttis non vestem modo permanavit, sed in medullam ultro pluit"*), Haines 1919.112.

50 Note that marrow is not the only organ thought of as sensate, as seen in the Lucretius passage quoted. Another popular organ for feeling is the liver: Theocritus and Moschus use the liver as a site of passion (Theoc. 13.71: Eros ἄμυσσεν Herakles' liver as he seeks his beloved Hylas, Moschus 2.16f.: Eros settles in σπλάγχνοις). Horace (*Od*. 1.25.15, *Ep*. 1.18.72) also uses the liver in erotic contexts, but somehow liver and entrails never achieved the status of erotic metaphor in literature.

1.36.11, *Fam*. 15.16.2.6, *Att*. 15.4.3.2). His emotions are not specifically passionate, but again the implication remains that a person feels a strong and true sentiment in the deepest part of the body, namely the marrow. The marrow thus functions also as a touchstone of sorts: Horace (*Ep*. 1.10.28) and Tibullus (3.1.25) both refer to someone dearer to themselves than their own *medullae*.

We would expect to find the definition of *medulla* as the site of emotion or passion, that is, the eroticized sense of the word, in the two most famous Latin love poets, Catullus and Ovid. But even they offer a wide range of connotations. Catullus uses medulla non-erotically three times (out of nine total): as the equivalent of core (68b.111), of vitals (58.13: "I am exhausted in my whole marrow" from searching for a lost friend), and finally as an insult directed at *cinaede Thalle*, who is softer than the marrow of a goose (25.1–2). This last example may also be read as an erotic reference, reminiscent of *AP* 12.37.2 quoted above.[51] Ovid's six (out of fifteen) non-erotic examples depend primarily on the definition of "marrow" as "core" or "innermost feeling." Thus, in a wonderful aetiology for coral, the core (*medulla*) of seaweed stiffens at the touch of Medusa's head (*Met*. 4.744). Myrrha's *medulla* remains the same as her body turns into a tree (*Met*. 10.492); presumably this means her "soul" is still human inside the bark of the myrrh tree. *Medulla* also appears as a seat for feelings other than passion: the loyalty of a friend remains "fixed deep in his marrow," *imis infixa medullis* (*Tr*. 1.5.9).

But finally we come to the more obvious examples of *medulla* as a *locus eroticus* as developed most fully in the poetry of Catullus, Vergil, and Ovid. Let us consider Catullus first, as he seems to represent a critical moment in the history of this erotic image. "Theocritus" offers our first recorded instance, the Greek scientific writers discuss it for their own academic purposes, and other lost sources may have developed the image further. But it is Catullus who adapts *medulla* wholly to an erotic context, and none of the elegists who follow will be able to ignore the connotation he gives to the word within the genre of love poetry.

Catullus combines the conventional theme of love's fires with a novel location of the lover's marrow to create a vivid new trope. Acme,

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51 See also Priap. 64.1: *quidam mollior anseris medulla*. What is it about a goose's marrow that is particularly "soft" or delicate? Unlike the sparrow, the goose is not known in antiquity to be particularly lascivious, so perhaps this image may be connected to a sense of richness familiar to us from goose liver paté.

trying to cap her lover's extravagant claims to love and loyalty, swears to Septimius that the fires of love burn even more harshly in her than in him (45.15–16):

> ut multo mihi maior acriorque
> ignis mollibus ardet in medullis.
>
> how much more strongly and more fiercely for me
> does the fire burn in my soft marrow.

While the word "marrow" itself is not used metaphorically here, the image of a fire burning in the marrow is. Marrow may be at the same time a physical substance, the innermost core of the body, and a poetic *locus eroticus* that is inherently metaphoric in nature. Catullus cites this *locus* frequently in his love poetry. The poet speaks in his own persona of a mad flame that scorches his marrow with eros (100.5–7):[52]

> . . . nam tua nobis
> perspecta est igni tum unica amicitia,
> cum vesana meas torreret flamma medullas.
>
> . . . for your friendship,
> unique, was then tried by fire,
> when a mad flame scorched my marrow.

In the case of frenzied Ariadne, the marrow is the site of both love and hate: at first she glows all aflame in her innermost marrow with passion for Theseus (64.92–93):

> . . . quam cuncto concepit corpore flammam
> funditus atque imis exarsit tota medullis.
>
> . . . how utterly she has caught love's fire in her entire
> body,
> and she glows all flame in her innermost marrow.

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52 The text is that of Quinn 1970, who follows Palmer in the reconstruction of line 6; that line may be problematic, but line 7 is clear enough for our argument.

But passion turns to anger after her abandonment and, instead of love, complaints now surge up from her *extremis medullis* (64.195–97):

> huc huc adventate, meas audite querellas,
> quas ego, vae misera, extremis proferre medullis
> cogor inops, ardens, amenti caeca furore.
>
> over here, come here, and listen to my complaints,
> which I, alas wretched woman, am forced to offer up
> from the depths of my marrow,
> helpless, burning, blind with crazed anger.

Vergil adapts Catullus' burning marrow in *Aeneid* 8 when Venus seduces Mars and the familiar heat of sexual arousal passes into his *medullas* and runs through his shaken frame (*Aen*. 8.389–90: *notusque medullas / intravit calor et labefacta per ossa cucurrit*), while Propertius combines the more conventional arrows of Cupid with the marrow as their target, claiming it is better to experience Ixion's wheel than to feel Cupid's arrow strike your marrow again and again, and be unable to deny your angry mistress anything (1.9.21–22).

Catullus takes the image one step further as he follows "Theocritus'" lead and gives eros the capacity to "eat" the lover's marrow. Thus, once Caecilius' girlfriend has read his literary masterpiece, she falls deeply in love and "fires consume [i.e., eat up] her innermost marrow" (35.15: *ignes interiorem edunt medullam*). Love combines with anxiety in the case of Berenice; at her brother's departure, cares gnaw away at her sad marrow deep within her body (66.22–23):[53]

> sed fratris cari flebile discidium?
> quam penitus maestas exedit cura medullas!
>
> but shall I mourn the departure of my dear brother?
> how anxiety wholly consumes my saddened marrow
> deep within!

53 As Stephen Hinds suggested to me, it would be interesting to speculate about what the Callimachean "original" at the end of *Aetia* 4, here translated by Catullus, might have looked like.

Catullus encourages us here not to read *medulla* as a "dead metaphor," but rather, as I suggested for "Theocritus" above, relocates it in its original epic context of animal sacrifice and feasting; he steps back from the grotesque just in time to remind us that these are not "real" fires but instead imaginary, erotic fires that gnaw at the marrow. The vision of an act of gnawing or eating is meant to shock by its violence; the simultaneous metaphorical reading sustains the violence but transforms the context into an erotic one, painting a picture of a destructive (and hungry—almost vampirish) eros.

The vivid impact of this *locus eroticus* on later poets is confirmed by Propertius' picture of Eros lodging in his bloodless marrow, presumably sucked dry by the vengeful god (2.12.15–17):

> evolat heu nostro quoniam de pectore nusquam
> assiduusque meo sanguine bella gerit.
> quid tibi iucundumst siccis habitare medullis?
>
> For alas he [Eros] never flies away from my heart,
> and unceasingly wages war inside my blood.
> why is it pleasing to you to dwell in my dried-out marrow?

Another heir to Catullus is Vergil, in his description of Dido's desperate erotic state in Book 4 (*Aen*. 4.66):

> est mollis flamma medullas
> interea et tacitum vivit sub pectore vulnus.
>
> Meanwhile a fire consumes her soft marrow,
> and a silent wound lives under her heart.

But Vergil is also inspired to turn the trope on its head: in Book 3 of the *Georgics*, during a description of spring fever, warmth returns to the bones of animals, and the "flame of eros steals into their craving marrows" (*G*. 3.271: *avidis ubi subdita flamma medullis*). Now the marrow itself, personified as a hungry animal, subject rather than object of the erotic assault, seems to gulp down the fire as food for its desires.[54]

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54 We can contrast this with *Georgics* 3.258–59, where eros pours fire into the bones, not the marrow: *versat in ossibus ignem / durus amor*. See also Propertius 1.9.29: *manus attigit ossa*, where Eros (in the manner of Archilochus) pierces to the bone.

The greatest heir to Catullus' erotic masterpieces is surely Ovid, who also wins hands down for sheer quantity of references (fifteen). As discussed above, Ovid uses the word in its several applications (e.g., bone marrow, inner core), but the erotic implications of the word quickly surface in his love poetry. His description of Apollo's lust for Daphne recalls the lines of Archilochus fr. 104 quoted above, but Ovid pointedly does go beyond the bone's surface and specifies the marrow.[55] The god is "pierced through the bones to his marrow" (*Met*. 1.472–73):

> hoc deus in nympha Peneide fixit, at illo
> laesit Apollineas traiecta per ossa medullas.
>
> this [arrow] the god [Eros] shot into the nymph,
> daughter of Peneus,
> but that [arrow] he shot into Apollo, pierced through
> the bones to his marrow.

It is useless to attempt here to differentiate "literal" from "metaphorical" usage or ask if the Latin audience really imagined an arrow entering Apollo's marrow (or if they really imagined Apollo at all . . .). But this application seems somehow closer to a primary or "literal" definition of the word (an arrow *can* be shot through bone to reach the marrow) than the following examples of erotic suffering in which fires are said to burn inside the marrow. The image of love's fires burning the marrow appears in a cross-section of Ovid's works. Flames creep through Canens' marrow as she lusts after Picus (*Met*. 14.351): "the flame seemed to wander all through her marrow" (*flammaque per totas visa est errare medullas*). Phaedra, quite likely echoing the earlier Euripidean passage, writes that Eros warms her marrow with his craving flame as she pines for Hippolytus (*Her*. 4.15): "he heats up my marrow with his eager fire" (*nostras avido fovet igne medullas*),[56] and, in the *Amores*, Ceres' tender *medullae* catch on fire with love for a mortal (*Am*. 3.10.27–28):

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55 Other Latin authors refer simply to love burning in the bones: Prop. 3.17.9, Verg. *Aen*. 1.659–60 (of Dido), *Aen*. 4.101 (of Dido), *G*. 3.258–59.

56 Cf. Verg. *G*. 3.271–72 quoted above, in which the *medullae* are called avid, actively craving the fire.

vidit, et ut tenerae flammam rapuere medullae,
hinc pudor, ex illa parte trahebat amor.[57]

She saw [him], and as her tender marrow caught fire,
on one side shame, and on the other side love
were tugging at her.

Ovid develops further the Catullan image of passion eating or gnawing a lover's marrow: speaking to a man who ignores his wife's suspicious behavior and gives her ample opportunity to cheat on him, Ovid wishes that erotic anxiety such as he himself feels should sometimes bite the husband's marrow (*Amores* 2.19.43–44):

mordeat ista tuas aliquando cura medullas,
daque locum nostris materiamque dolis.

may that [erotic] anxiety sometimes bite at your
marrow,
and give me place and ideas for my tricks.

Ovid also imagines his lovers experiencing sexual pleasure deep inside the marrow; here, as in the passages from Plato's *Timaeus*, the *medulla* becomes the site of sexual focus and release: Byblis dreams of sex with her brother (*Met*. 9.483–84):

gaudia quanta tuli! quam me manifesta libido
contigit! ut iacui totis resoluta medullis!

how many joys I experienced! how obviously desire
touched me!
how I lay there, dissolved in my entire marrow!

Elsewhere, Ovid presents the ideal moment of a mutually enjoyable encounter in which the woman is dissolved to the very depths of her marrow in the act of making love (*Ars Am*. 3.793–94):

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57 In *Met*. 9.174, Herakles' very marrow melts with the hidden deadly fire of the poisonous robe sent by Deianeira. One could read this scene (and its model in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*) as a variation on the sexual "burning" discussed above: the robe is sent out of love and intended to re-ignite passion, not kill its victim.

> Sentiat ex imis venerem resoluta medullis
> femina, et ex aequo res iuvet illa duos.
>
> Let the woman feel love, dissolved to the very depths
> of her marrow,
> and let the affair please both parties equally.

Since Ovid is writing this third book of his didactic treatise purportedly for a strictly female audience, it may not be fair to ask why he does not imagine the man's marrow dissolving simultaneously with the woman's. But I suspect that the idea of dissolution would have been too frightening for the male Roman audience, while a vaguer "equal pleasure" is less threatening.

In both erotic and non-erotic contexts, the marrow defines bodily integrity; thus, in an extreme case which combines love and death, the dissolution of the marrow is irreversible: Canens' marrow turns to water and her body gradually vanishes as she mourns her dead beloved (*Met*. 14.431–32):

> luctibus extremum tenues liquefacta medullas
> tabuit inque leves paulatim evanuit auras.
>
> at the end, in her grief, her delicate marrow dissolved,
> she began to melt, and slowly vanished into the light
> breezes.

Here the effect that love has on the marrow, usually understood to be figurative, is translated into a literal death and the complete dissolution of the body.

The final example of Canens, in which the metaphor of melting marrow becomes nightmarishly "real," leads me to ask the question to which I alluded earlier. All the authors discussed show a curious consistency in applying a medical theory of male physiology (i.e., the spermatic marrow) to women in love. So, while the scientific writers argue that marrow plays a role in sex because the man's seed *is* marrow, and the literary writers imply that spending one's seed/marrow results in loss of strength or even (in the worst case) death, the image of marrow as a *locus eroticus* in love poetry is used almost exclusively of women. The reason for this skewing must lie in a cultural attitude which tells us that men view sex as a kind of conquest. If sex is an issue of power and virility, no man is

willing to imagine himself weakened or victimized by the act. Shakespeare's explicit contrast between love-making and warfare in *All's Well That Ends Well* (2.3.284) brings the point home: "his manly marrow" should be kept well away from women and rather spend its energy on the battlefield. The transferal of the image to the female sphere may be read as a culture's attempt to alleviate male anxiety about losing oneself, one's bodily integrity, one's life. Thus the love poets make women dissolve, burn, or feel anguish in their marrow; it is female marrow that is eaten up by eros. Ovid may encourage mutual pleasure in sex, but not mutual "dissolution"; men never dissolve in their very marrow at the climax of the act. The peculiarly skewed use of the metaphor reveals the cultural myth of male aggression and female passivity, of "the gendered relations of domination and submission so intrinsic to Roman constructions of sexuality."[58]

V. CONCLUSIONS

We have traced the use of *medulla* or μυελός from its earliest literary occurrence as a physical substance to its "metaphorical" flowering in the erotic poems of Catullus and Ovid. Later authors did not sustain the semantic richness of Ovidian usage, and the word gradually settles back into the relatively colorless meaning of "core," which we first saw in our earliest examples from Homer. This survey does help us understand, however, why Juvenal would choose to name a woman with a particularly voracious sexual appetite "Medullina" (*Sat*. 6.322).[59] It also gives us some background for Apuleius' marvelously mixed metaphor of erotic conflagration, when a wicked stepmother who has fallen, Phaedra-like, in love with her husband's son, tries to seduce him by describing her obsession in terms of eyes, heart, fire, and marrow (*Met*. 10.3.20–22):[60]

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58 I quote the stimulating essay of Wyke 1995.110–28, esp. 116. It is worth mentioning here, as suggested to me by Stephen Hinds, that, in Latin elegiac poetry, men indeed *are* represented as enervated, exhausted, feminized by passion. As Maria Wyke (1995.116) puts it, "there are a number of significant respects in which the male lover/poet of Propertian elegy is acknowledged as undergoing the woman's role, taking the woman's part, putting himself into play as the feminine." See also Edwards 1993.63–97.

59 This passage is balanced by two "unmarked" uses: 8.90, in which impoverished country folk have their bones sucked dry of marrow, and 14. 215, where Juvenal asks for patience in dealing with young people, whose bones are not yet filled up with the marrow of ripe wickedness.

60 Apuleius uses the word numerous times to mean "deep in one's heart," mostly of some strong emotion or physical reaction: see *Met*. 7.2.18, 7.17.10, 8.7.27, 10.25.5, 10.26.27.

> Isti enim tui oculi per meos oculos ad intima delapsi praecordia meis medullis acerrimum commovent incendium.
>
> Your eyes, having slipped through my eyes deep into my heart, have kindled the most intense fire in my marrow.

I hope that my lengthy list of examples has not obscured the basic oddness of this metaphor: the marrow may be the most interior substance in the body, and therefore represent the most interior space, but it is a particularly insensate organ, and thus a peculiar location for erotic experience. That the Greek poets never developed the marrow as a *locus eroticus* suggests that they held a similar opinion.[61]

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See also *Apol*. 49.13, Fl. 18.138, and *Pl*. 1.16.23, 2.16.34. The word also appears in Petronius *Sat*. 119.1.54 (trouble spreads like some disease in the marrow), 121.1.106 (anger and hatred burn in Fortune's marrow), and 137.10.6 (of the kernel of a hazelnut used in magic).

61 This paper originated as an oral presentation at the 1993 APA Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. It was subsequently revised in the summer of 1996 in the public library of Palestine, Texas, and submitted in final form to *Arethusa* in late summer 1997. Bibliography is therefore current only until that year. I acknowledge the helpful criticisms and suggestions of S. Flaherty, M. Halleran, S. Hinds, G. E. R. Lloyd, and H. von Staden. The anonymous referee for *Arethusa* made me (properly) uncomfortably aware of my ideological assumptions, and I only wish I could have reframed my questions to answer more satisfactorily all his/her criticisms. Faults with the argument that remain are, of course, my own.

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