OFFICIUM IN CATULLUS AND PROPERTIUS: A FOUCAULDIAN READING

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THIS PAPER APPLIES A CONCEPT taken from Foucault's *History of Sexuality* to the ambivalent political stance of Roman poetry of the first century B.C.E. Poets clearly circulate among the elite of society, yet appear to represent themselves as being alienated from Roman political life.[1] As a chronicler of the pervasive intrusion of power into every aspect of human life, Foucault analyzes the process by which power not only exerts its influence over an object but engenders in it a paradoxical desire to be viewed, controlled, and described. In volume one of his *History of Sexuality* Foucault describes this reciprocal process as "a sensualization of power and a gain of pleasure."[2] By "sensualization of power" he means that power becomes infected with the qualities of its object. This process has a darker side, however. "A gain of pleasure" describes the experience that occurs when the surveillance of an object becomes a part of the erotic experience and proceeds to heighten it. This complicity on the part of the object limits its potential subversiveness. For it prevents the object from ever separating fully from the power that affects it. Foucault comments: "Pleasure spreads to the power that harried it. . . . These attractions [were] . . . not boundaries to be crossed, but perpetual spirals of power and pleasure."[3] Foucault's imagistic presentation of the interrelationship of power and pleasure runs counter to more traditional teleological models (linear or cyclical) with clearly defined subjects and objects. His image of the spiral reinforces this idea; its oblique motion is iconic for a non-teleological theory of power and history. Likewise, the perpetual alternation—but final separateness—of the strands denies the reducibility of power to pleasure, or vice versa.

Foucault is writing about the discourse of what he calls "sexuality," and the institutional incentives that caused it to come into being in the eighteenth century. His analysis, accordingly, can not be applied uncritically to

I have elected to translate *officium* as "duty" throughout. "Business" works better in English for the erotic usages of the word, but it lacks the gravity necessary to render the full ambiguity of the speech of Q. Haterius (below, pp. 219–20) and of Tatius' cruel speech to Tarpeia (below, p. 223).

1. For discussions of the complex responses of Catullus and Augustan poetry to the expectations of their society, see Gordon Williams, *Tradition and Originality in Roman Poetry* (Oxford, 1966), 41–43, 557–59; Carl Rubino, "The Erotic World of Catullus," *CW* 68.5 (1975): 289–98; Hans-Peter Stahl, *Propertius: "Love" and "War"* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985): 99–129, 248–64; Paul Veyne, *Roman Erotic Elegy: Love, Poetry, and the West,* trans. David Pellauer (Chicago, 1988), 101–15.

2. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* volume 1: *An Introduction,* trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1978), 44.

3. Foucault, *History of Sexuality,* 1:45.

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the Roman world. Nevertheless, aspects of Roman poetry that point to its uncertain political stance, such as its self-proclaimed dissidence, together with its quasi-official patronage, make Foucault's "spirals of power and pleasure" relevant.

Most critics would agree that both politics and aesthetics play important roles in Augustan literary production, but their precise relationship is more difficult to determine. Various formulations have been proposed. Stahl, for example, sees politics at the heart of Propertius. He dismisses what he regards as the standard developmental hypothesis for interpreting the work of Propertius, according to which "one curve, signifying his love, would steadily fall, while the other, signifying the national Callimachus, would steadily rise."[4] He concedes that the Propertian oeuvre, particularly Book 4, took the form that it did because of pressure from the Augustan regime, but suggests "the possibility of *outward* change while personal attitude remains the same" (italics mine). Thus Stahl offers the image of Propertius as essentially an anti-Augustan who gradually complied with the regime on a superficial level. Veyne, by contrast, offers a purely aesthetic interpretation of the genre in which little room for politics remains: "Roman erotic elegy only appeals to reality in order to contrast itself to it."[5] Contrasting elegiac poetry with bucolic, he argues that the oppositional nature of elegy is found in its passive refusal to comply:

> [W]hereas bucolic always abstracts itself from reality, erotic elegy, which does the same thing only in order to reattach itself to reality, must therefore expressly reflect what the pastoral can pass over in silence. Except that the elegy does so insistently; it goes on at such length about the delights of love that, by all evidence, it finds some pleasure in this rejection: the pleasure of jeering at social conventions, of defying the rules, of inverting values; inverting them so as to laugh. The elegiac instrument has no string for sounding more serious notes.[6]

Although Veyne acknowledges the nonconformist stance of elegiac poetry, he considers its opposition essentially passive, and in the end returns to a view that emphasizes its literary, Alexandrian element. To say that elegy has no string for sounding more serious notes is to subscribe to the traditional view of an ascending hierarchy of genres, with erotic verse at the bottom and the serious modes of epic and tragedy at the top. Such a view necessarily minimizes the political aspect of elegy in favor of genres that can play more serious notes.

Stahl's and Veyne's positions are indicative of the way in which even sophisticated models of elegy tend to emphasize politics or aesthetics at the expense of the other. Such a state of affairs in turn suggests the usefulness of a model like Foucault's, which analyzes the political and the erotic as

4. Stahl, *"Love" and "War,"* 134–35.

5. Veyne, *Erotic Elegy,* 29.

6. Ibid., 104. W. R. Johnson takes the opposite view. Concerning the "transvaluation of Roman values" effected by Catullus he writes: "Other, earlier users of the Catullan motif tended to be (mockingly) apologetic, as if the poet-lovers' leisure, their love, their art, were somehow minor forms of treachery to the state. But when Ovid rejects empire, together with epic and tragedy, its literary counterparts, he often does so with heroic gusto (*Amores* 1.1,15, 2.1, 3.1)" ("Ovid," in *Ancient Writers: Greece and Rome,* vol. 2, ed. T. J. Luce [New York, 1982], 790).

organically linked and fundamentally inseparable. Foucault refers to this interplay as the "tactical polyvalence of discourses."[7]

I shall illustrate this "tactical polyvalence" by focusing on the associations of *officium,* first in Catullus, then primarily in Propertius, to show how these poets attempted to redefine Roman values by their use of political language. By exploiting the blurred border between the vocabularies of love and social relations, they were able to claim a separate, privileged status for their work.[8] However, because their contestation of Roman values is not easily compatible with the desire to remain outside of the normative controls of society, I will argue that the language of the poets betrays the cost of this strategic move. The poets' use of the term *officium* carries with it the trace of the word's history. Its presence in poetic texts not only empowers but also compromises them.[9]

The first volume of *The History of Sexuality* argues strongly against the idea that modern history has seen either the repression of sexuality through the promotion of bourgeois respectability or that there has been a recent "liberation" of these supposedly latent forces. Foucault's thesis appears at least counter-intuitive, as can be seen by the common meaning of the adjective "Victorian" to mean repressed. Nevertheless, according to Foucault the last three centuries have seen "a steady proliferation of discourses concerning sex."[10] A major contributor to this increase has been the Christian emphasis on confession and, in Foucault's words, "the task of passing everything to do with sex through the endless mill of speech."[11] This discourse historically included not only the words of the believer who came to confess his or her sins, but also the handbooks prepared for officiating priests with their explicit directives to describe "the respective positions of the partners, the postures assumed, gestures, places touched, caresses, the precise moment of pleasure—an entire painstaking review of the sexual act in its unfolding."[12] Perhaps even more important, however, has been the medicalization of sex and the creation of different discourses to give disciplines like medicine and psychiatry their broad cultural and intellectual authority. The result of these developments was the invention of "sexuality," understood here as a complex of ideas[13] that provides a "scientific" justification for the newly identified object's medico-juridical regulation.[14] Arnold Davidson argues

7. *History of Sexuality,* 1:100–102. For a fuller discussion of the passage see pp. 215–16.

8. The tactic is similar to their use of *otium* and symposiastic motifs in Horace to create an imaginative space for poetry safe from political intrusion. Cf., for example, his advice to Plancus at *Odes* 1.7.17–24.

9. Cf. Duncan Kennedy, *The Arts of Love: Five Studies in the Discourse of Roman Love Elegy* (Cambridge, 1993), 11: "But however much an approach succeeds in marginalizing one term at the expense of the other, the other always remains operative within it, however occluded, and renders the reading available for recuperation for and in the very terms occluded." See also the discussion of "trace" in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore, 1977), 63–70, et passim.

10. *History of Sexuality,* 1:18–19.

11. Ibid., 1:21.

12. Ibid., 1:19.

13. Foucault's term is "dispositif," translated as "deployment." It appears to occupy a semantic space similar to that of the term *épistémè* in his earlier work.

14. Consider, for example, the "neuropathic," the "fetishist," "congenital sexual perversion," and the entire panoply of quasi-scientific terms familiar from nineteenth-century tracts on sexual behavior, e.g., the *Psychopathia Sexualis* of Richard von Krafft-Ebing (English trans. H. E. Wedeck [New York, 1965]).

that its invention can be linked explicitly to the invention of what he calls "psychiatric reasoning," beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century when sexual identity ceased to be a question of anatomy and became a "matter of impulses, tastes, aptitudes, satisfactions and psychic traits."[15] "Sexuality" is therefore a relatively recent phenomenon and an important aspect of the organization and control of populations.[16]

Sexuality in Foucault's sense is not simply a tactic that has been issued from one ruling institution or another to control an otherwise disobedient human subject. Rather it is constructed in such a way that its application is inseparable from the individual desires of those it affects. The manifestation of authority comprises both subject and object in an inextricable dance of power relations. Foucault describes his research in the following way:

> Here too my main concern will be to locate the forms of power, the channels it takes and the discourse it permeates in order to reach the most tenuous and individual modes of behavior, the paths that give it access to the rare or scarcely perceivable forms of desire, how it penetrates and controls everyday pleasure—all this entailing effects that may be those of refusal, blockage, and invalidation, but also incitement and intensification; in short the "polymorphous techniques of power."[17]

Foucault cannot be seen as engaged in a project to free the individual from the insidious intrusion of power; for power, he emphasizes, is everywhere. His insistence on its ubiquity explains in part his scorn for the idea of politics as "liberation."[18] Since the tactics of "liberation" demand a dialectical movement of revolt against an oppressor, they do not occupy a place outside power relations but are in fact an integral part of them. Even when successful, they erase the power they oppose only to reinscribe it under new conditions. It does not disappear. In Foucault's "tactical polyvalence of discourses,"[19] power and its objects exist in a continuous sequence of unstable relationships, each progressively undermined and reified by the other:

> To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies.[20]

The interplay of discourses has polyvalent possibilities:

> We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance, and a starting point for an opposing strategy.[21]

By focusing on discourses that "can be both an instrument and an effect of power," Foucault explicitly denies a separation between dominator and

15. "Sex and the Emergence of Sexuality," *Critical Inquiry* 14 (1987): 16–48.
16. Foucault coins the term "bio-power" to describe these new tactics of power. See *History of Sexuality*, 1:139–45.
17. Ibid., 1:11.
18. Ibid., 1:169.
19. Ibid., 1:100–102.
20. Ibid., 1:100.
21. Ibid., 1:101.

dominated. His formula can also be applied to the copresence of politics and eros in Roman poetry, which is sometimes seen as representing the clash of a dominant discourse (politics) and a dominated one (eros). Following Foucault's model, however, we see that the relationship between dominator and dominated is more than a simple one-way movement of power from oppressor to oppressed. In fact, the complex relationship between politics and eros is best characterized by Foucault's image of the "perpetual spirals of power and pleasure," in which the terms "dominant" and "dominated" are unstable and inseparable. This image allows us to appreciate more fully Catullus' and Propertius' use of a vocabulary of power for their worlds of pleasure and the strategic advantages they derived from it. In addition, we will see the spiral from another angle: the purity of the poetic world is compromised by the presence of traditional Roman political values. The poets thus confront a double bind: they exploit the copresence of politics within the erotic discourses, but in so doing open their own texts to the influence of the values they claim to reject. It is therefore unsurprising that the position they construct for themselves in Roman life is often ambiguous or polyvalent.

Before examining poetic *officium* in detail, it will be worthwhile to sketch briefly the political context of Roman poetry of the first century B.C.E. Although the age of Augustus has at times been perceived as a period of recuperation after the exhausting excesses of civil war, recent studies have emphasized the difficulty of describing the Augustan regime as a homogeneous and unambiguous entity. As D. C. Feeney has written:

> However much modern observers need to refine definitions of "Augustanism" for the purposes of analysis and pedagogy, we must bear in mind that "Augustanism" was not a dogma conceived by a small band and handed down to a receptive, passive audience. Augustus and his apparatus represented a disorienting irruption into the Roman value-system, yet he and his apparatus were themselves conditioned by responses, even initiatives, from "below": the ideologies by which Romans constructed their world were a product of contestation and dialogue.[22]

This process of "contestation and dialogue" also describes the time in which Catullus wrote when, despite overall ideological unity among the upper classes, an intense struggle for intellectual and political authority took place. The complexity of both periods is reflected in the uses of the word *officium* by Catullus and Propertius. The word is often translated "duty," but has a wide range of semantic associations from the passive obedience of soldiers to some of the erotic associations I will be considering later. *Officium* includes more than the words and deeds of political leaders and generals—*officium* in the most elevated sense—but also the *officia* of everyday life, whether unassuming in character or remarkable.[23] Through a

22. D. C. Feeney, "*Si licet et fas est:* Ovid's *Fasti* and the Problem of Free Speech under the Principate," in *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus,* ed. Anton Powell (London, 1992), 3.

23. Behind this rehabilitated sense of *officium* lies the concept of "prosaics" as it is developed by Caryl Emerson and Gary Saul Morson to describe Bakhtin's model of "thinking that presumes the importance of the everyday, the ordinary, the prosaic" (*Mikhail Bakhtin: The Creation of a Prosaics* [Stanford, 1990], 15–37).

study of *officium,* the elegiac world of love and idleness can be seen to contribute to Feeney's process of "contestation and dialogue." As Duncan Kennedy observes: "reconciliation and integration, certainly prominent features of elegiac love, are . . . political processes in that they affect the distribution of power in specific social contexts, and yet they do not attract the description 'political.'"[24] Viewed in this way, the political position of poetry could be seen to be every bit as shifting as the meaning of "Augustanism" itself.

Augustan poets follow the Catullan practice of using political metaphors to discuss their private worlds where poetry and eros are systematically linked. They also use distinctive erotic vocabulary, trope, and rhetorical coloring to make implicit political statements. The concept of the citizen-lover is exploited by erotic elegy as a part of the poets' self-conscious effort to reposition poetry to rival politics as the true *officium* of a Roman.[25] The result, even when the attempt is facetious, is both to destabilize political discourse by connecting it with the *levia* of poetic speech and to make an implicit claim for the privileged status of poetry as opposed to politics. For poetry to adopt and incorporate the language of the hegemonic discourse of politics is to argue implicitly for its superiority as the more inclusive and hence more powerful form of speech.[26]

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the admission of political life into the language of love poetry increases the authority of erotic discourse, its presence among the *loci amoeni* of the poets only conditionally deprives the political world of authority. Eventually politics comes to structure the poetic world as much as it is structured by it.[27] This is evident in Catullus' and Propertius' use of *officium.* Their use of the word increases the scope of the poem by casting it as a source of political as well as erotic understanding. At the same time, this enhanced *officium* represents a threat both to eros and to any attempt to privilege the poetic voice at the expense of politics. This threat, particularly as perceived by Propertius, is the reason for the word's distinctly ambivalent connotations.

I begin with Catullus and his use of a vocabulary that can be shared by private, erotic life and the world of Roman politics. One thinks immediately of the *sanctae foedus amicitiae* of poem 109, of the *amicitia, fides, pietas,*

24. " 'Augustan' and 'Anti-Augustan': Reflections on Terms of Reference," in Powell, ed., *Poetry and Propaganda,* 30. For the application of this observation to Propertius see also Kennedy, *Arts of Love,* 34–38.

25. For a discussion of the distrust of erotic *otium* in Roman culture see Veyne, *Erotic Elegy,* 162–63: "The problem is that when the ancients say that *otium* produces amorous servitude, they had something quite different in mind. They believed that it was from weakness that a man would refuse to serve the public good or the patrimony of his family. In either case, if he was not already weak, he would become so, out of laziness and lack of exercise." See also 158–61, 164–68.

26. For a similar view of the political effect of parody, see G. S. Morson "Parody, History and Metaparody," in *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges,* ed. G. S. Morson and Caryl Emerson (Evanston, 1989), 78–79.

27. Cf. David Cohen, *Law, Sexuality and Society: The Enforcement of Morals in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 1991), 16–17, for a discussion of the similar interanimation between strategic behavior and normative expectations with respect to law.

and *foedus* in poems 72–76, which Catullus accuses Lesbia of having destroyed, and of numerous other distinctive formulations. These expressions indicate that the bonds of affection must be conceived as similar to the bonds that structure political alliance. This expansion of the possibilities for erotic expression in Catullus has been noted by commentators, particularly in the Lesbia poems that employ a vocabulary best known for its connections with Roman political alliance.[28] The movement of language here is not one-way, with politics a valorized category that is then used as a metaphor for love and love poetry. Both the world of love and the world of political life with its more or less traditional expectations share a language, with priority belonging to neither.[29] Nevertheless, the copresence of both discourses in Latin speech is not simply a reflection of their compatibility, for each seeks to exclude the other. Traditionally, poetry and philosophy are suspected of being unmanly, and poetry attempts to create a *locus amoenus* safe from the intrusion of politics.[30] Thus, by exhibiting the mutually exclusive claims of erotic and political *pietas, fides,* and *foedus,* the combined language of politics and love shows a contestation of values similar to those present in contemporary ideologically driven discourses like "family values" and "patriotism."[31] The Catullan contestation in poems 72–76 sets Rome, represented by the degenerate faith and bond of Lesbia, against the supposedly purer consciousness of Catullus, who possesses genuine Roman virtues.[32]

But Catullus' poetic rehabilitation of Roman virtue is not complete. Without a partner, even his purified *fides* and *foedus* cannot remain intact.[33] Thus, he sarcastically refers to his *officium* in poem 75 (1–2): "Huc est mens deducta tua mea, Lesbia, culpa / atque ita se officio perdidit ipsa suo" ("My mind is led here, Lesbia, by your fault and thus has destroyed itself by its duty"). To do one's duty even in the erotic Catullan sense is to lay one's self open to the corrupting presence of political institutions. Lesbia's sense of "duty" is finally asymetrical to that of Catullus, for she does not accept that she is bound by the reciprocal obligations he imagines, and, as a result, his vision of erotic "alliance" must cease to exist. For Catullus the erotic experience of *officium* ends in disillusionment.

28. See Williams, *Tradition and Originality,* 407–9; David O. Ross, *Backgrounds To Augustan Poetry* (Cambridge, 1975), 11–12.

29. See Stephen Dyson, "Catullus 8 and 76," *CQ* 22 (1973): 127–43, especially 138, for a critique of the view that the presence of politics in Catullus is a case of "appropriation." For a critique of the tendency to see poetry as borrowing metaphors from "reality" see Kennedy, *Arts of Love,* 46–63.

30. See Paul Allen Miller, *Lyric Texts and Lyric Consciousness: The Birth of a Genre from Archaic Greece to Augustan Rome* (London and New York, 1994), 136–37.

31. For an analogous argument concerning the ideology of fourth-century Athens see Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton, 1989), 40–41.

32. This purity is also tactical, however, and is certainly not the only position occupied by Catullus the author/character. Cf. Dyson, "Catullus 8 and 76," 138, who argues against reading inconsistently invoked concepts like *pietas* into the corpus as a whole.

33. The formulation is nevertheless remarkable in that it presupposes an isonomic relationship foreign to the Greek tradition that originated it. The pederastic model of citizenship, based on the ability of the ἐραστής to educate and improve the ἐρώμενος always assumes a hierarchical relationship between the lovers. They are not "partners."

The final strophe of poem 75 also displays the intrusion of public (if conventional) institutions (*reges et urbes*) into private erotic speech.[34] In poem 51 (13–16), however, *otium,* not *officium,* is represented as the potential corrupting force:

> *otium,* Catulle, tibi molestum est:
> *otio* exsultas nimiumque gestis:
> *otium* et reges prius et beatas
> perdidit urbes.
>
> Leisure is trouble for you, Catullus,
> you revel in leisure and indulge too much.
> Leisure has destroyed kings of old
> and prosperous cities.

Catullus' condemnation of *otium* has an ironic aspect. As Gordon Williams notes: "A man who has described the physiological manifestations of his love-sickness and then makes that statement [about *otium*] is surely mocking himself."[35] Nevertheless, the language of Catullus leaves the final status of *otium* in an unresolvable tension.[36] Both the reader and Catullus are forced to jump from one evaluation of it to another. *Otium* in the old disreputable sense suggests decadence, as Catullus tells himself, but it is potentially good for Catullus—as for later poets—because it represents the rejection of business and politics in favor of an erotic identity and poetry. If, however, Catullus were fully successful in converting love poetry into true political *officium,* as he attempts to do in poems 72–75, the end of poem 51 could no longer be ironic. For if love and poetry were all "business," even a pleasurable one, then *otium* would be equivalent to its abandonment, and Catullus' practice would belong suddenly to the domain of the *senes severiores* rather than the world of the antinomian erotic poet.

Otium creates a space both oppositional and imaginative within which the poet can rhetorically resist the ideological demands of Roman society for business and duty in their conventional sense. By claiming this space, the poet can even use the vocabularies of political life in his own work. But if he is completely successful in this venture, then *otium* as a kind of political dissent disappears and the jealously maintained separateness of the elegiac world ceases to exist.[37] To preserve the power of his oppositional version of *otium* the poet must therefore represent his construction of *officium* as

34. Eduard Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), 111–13, discusses the erotic *otium* of the first two examples and distinguishes it from the political *otium* that destroys cities and kings, which he connects with the popular image of luxury bringing with it indolence and decline. For the topos see Sall. *Iug.* 41.1, *H.* 1, frag. 11.

35. Williams, *Tradition and Originality,* 252.

36. In Paul Allen Miller's discussion of the relation of Catullus 50 (Catullus' account of an afternoon spent in idleness, *otiosi* with Calvus) to 51, he argues: "*Otium* here has an antithetical set of connotations to those found in the last stanza of 51, with the immediate juxtaposition of the two poems highlighting the tension between those connotations, as well as the ambiguous position of the Catullan ego in regard to its society" (*Lyric Texts,* 138). He goes on to refer to the ambivalence of *otium* as "semiotic slippage," without which Catullus' lyric consciousness would be unrepresentable within the context of Roman ideology.

37. For a discussion of the double bind in Ovid that forces the poet to put a limit on his own erotic imaginary, see the reading of the Pygmalion story in Alysa Ward, "The Imitation of Love (Or, The Truth of Desire)," unpublished paper.

somehow marginalized or invalidated. He must execute a sort of *clinamen* from his own poetic self that will allow him to pull back from his rehabilitation of "duty" and preserve his poetic "leisure."[38] This "swerve" is, in fact, executed by Catullus in poems 72–76, where the betrayal lamented by Catullus shows his erotic *officium* ultimately to be powerless against the corrupting influence of Lesbia's broken faith and absent sense of duty.[39] At the same time the moral superiority that Catullus claims for himself prevents the dissolution of the idea of his erotic duty. Thus the play between *otium* and *officium* in Catullus remains in an irreducible state of tension.

To summarize this line of thought: if Catullus were to fail utterly in his critique of Roman values, he would fall silent as an advocate of love and poetry. But the penalty for total success would be equally high. His dissident posture is a fragile complex of contradictory ideas that depends for its existence on the coexistence of the mutually exclusive worlds of love and politics. To disturb their tension is to destroy Catullus' world. His work depends on the promise of success in his enterprise, but it cannot exist without the certainty of failure.[40]

The sexual sense of duty appears to have been fairly widespread both in poetry and in Roman culture generally. It does not appear to have been an invention of the Augustans.[41] According to Hellegouarc'h it may have originated in "la langue des paysans et des artisans."[42] Adams notes Cicero's use of *servire,* one particular form of *officium* in a sexual sense (*Cat.* 2.8, *Phil.* 2.86),[43] and the same connotation is implicit in Plautine expressions like *officium meretricium* (*Cas.* 585) and *puerile officium* (*Cist.* 657). Such expressions show that the languages of eros and politics are closely interwoven even in ordinary Latin and suggest that there is a duty appropriate to every class.[44] Although present from an early period, the erotic connection does not seem to have been fully developed in politics until later. Seneca the Elder quotes the inadvertent pun of the Augustan orator Q. Haterius (*Con.* 4, pr. 10):

> Memini illum, cum libertinum reum defenderet, cui obiciebatur quod patroni concubinus fuisset, dixisse: impudicitia in ingenuo crimen est, in servo necessitas, in liberto *officium.* Res in iocos abiit: "non facis mihi *officium*" et "multum ille huic *in officiis* versatur." Ex eo impudici et obsceni aliquamdiu "*officiosi*" vocati sunt.

38. For *clinamen* as a poetic principle see Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford, 1973), 19–45.

39. Joseph Hellegouarc'h, *Le vocabulaire latin des relations et des partis politiques sous la république* (Paris, 1972), 154, discusses the reciprocal obligations implied by a relationship of *amicitia.*

40. For an account of this negative, transgressive character of art see Maurice Blanchot, "Le Regard d'Orphée," in *L'Espace littéraire* (Paris, 1955), 179–84.

41. For the metaphor in Greek literature see Page duBois, *Sowing the Body: Psychoanalysis and Ancient Representations of Women* (Chicago, 1988), esp. 39–64; Anne Carson, "Putting Her in Her Place: Woman, Dirt, and Desire," in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient World,* ed. David Halperin, J. J. Winkler, F. I. Zeitlin (Princeton, 1990), 149–53. For Roman usage see J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore, 1982), 163; René Pichon, *De Sermone Amatorio apud Latinos Elegiarum Scriptores* (Paris, 1902), 220, 262.

42. *Vocabulaire des relations,* 152.

43. *Latin Sexual Vocabulary,* 163–64. Cf. Ov. *Ars Am.* 2.688 *officium faciat nulla puella mihi.* See also Hermann Tränkle, *Die Sprachkunst des Properz und die Tradition der lateinischen Dichtersprache,* Hermes Einzelschriften, Heft 15 (Wiesbaden, 1960), 164–65.

44. Hellegouarc'h, *Vocabulaire des relations,* 153–54.

> I remember that when he was defending a freedman who was charged with having been the lover of his patron he said "unchastity is a crime for the freeborn, necessity for the slave, and duty for a freedman." The matter resulted in jokes: "You are not doing your duty for me" and "He is really busy with his duties for him." Because of that the unchaste and the obscene were for some time called "dutiful."

The story links two important points, first that for an Augustan audience the vocabularies of socio-political alliance and erotic association were sufficiently similar to generate a popular series of jokes; second, that since there is nothing to suggest that Haterius intended to be funny,[45] the double meaning of *officium* had not yet been fully exploited and, therefore, was not part of the repertoire of a Roman orator.[46]

Despite the use of *officium* in political and erotic contexts in the Republican period, the double meaning of the word was not frequently invoked, and it is likely that Catullus and the Augustan poets first problematized its ambivalence. Both Propertius and Ovid use *officium* in its sexual sense. Their tone is swaggering. Propertius (2.22a.23–24) boasts that his "duty" is strong all night: " . . . saepest experta puella *officium* tota nocte valere *meum*" ("often a girl has felt my duty all night long"). Likewise at *Amores* 3.7.23–24, the notorious impotence poem, Ovid uses the term similarly in a nostalgic survey of his erotic career: "At nuper bis flava Chlide, ter candida Pitho, / ter Libas *officio* continuata *meo* est" ("But just recently blond Chlide twice, three times bright Pitho, three times Libas was joined with my duty"). Thus, both poets exploit the erotic potential of *officium,* elsewhere so intimately bound up with the world of Roman political life.

We have already seen how Catullus' formulation of duty and leisure is itself a highly ambiguous and unstable idea; a similar argument can be made for Propertius' *officium.* Propertius uses the word in a positive sexual sense once, but often the word exhibits the same ambivalent associations that we noted in the case of the Catullan tension between *otium* and *officium.* Propertius, too, can make eros his business, but doing so opens his poetry to the savagery of Augustan society that his elegiac world rejects. Despite the apparent insouciance of his *officium tota nocte valere meum,* the other five places where the word appears in the Propertian corpus show its meaning to be ambiguous at best. In 4.9, Heracles refers to his *servilia . . . officia* (47–48) at the court of the Lydian queen Omphale. The words refer directly to his female garb, which in turn expresses his lowly status and the fact that he is not the master of his own will. They take on an added significance, however, in the context of the sexual associations of both slavery and duty. Though his service to Omphale may not be sexual, the determination of that question is left up to the discretion of the queen, and the "necessity" of that act, to use the words of Haterius (*in servo necessitas*), is implicit in the language of Heracles.

45. It would not be his last slip, literal or figurative; see Tac. *Ann.* 1.12.

46. Nor does *officiosus* appear to be double-voiced, judging from its usage in Republican prose. See Hellegouarc'h, *Vocabulaire des relations,* 156.

In 1.20 the poet warns a certain Gallus not to lose his boyfriend while traveling, and recounts the story of Heracles and Hylas as a negative exemplum. At the climax of the narrative, Hylas, who had succeeded in eluding the airborne advances of Zetes and Calais, pauses to gather flowers (1.20.39–42):

> quae modo decerpens tenero pueriliter ungui
> *proposito* florem praetulit *officio,*
> et modo formosis incumbens nescius undis
> errorem blandis tardat imaginibus.
>
> Plucking these boyishly with a delicate nail
> he prefers the flowers to his assigned duty,
> and bending over the beautiful waves unknowing,
> he prolongs his error with pleasant images.

The nymphs finally notice his spectacular beauty and immediately pull him underwater. On one level Hylas' inattention to *officium* is simply escapist. He luxuriates in his puerile sensuality by plucking flowers and contemplating his own image, rather than completing the practical task of bringing water to Heracles. On another level, however, it is his erotic duty to Heracles as squire and lover that puts him within the reach of the predatory Dryads in the first place. Thus, Propertius presents us with another ambivalent image of *officium,* as we saw in Catullus and in the Omphale poem in Book 4. Hylas' self-indulgent idleness does not really bring about an escape from duty into an unambiguous *otium;* rather, it produces no more than a change of sexual masters.

Officium appears next in Book 2, again as an exemplum (this time a positive one). Propertius tells the story of Tithonus and Dawn to an apparently uncooperative partner—by the end she is addressed as *perfida* (2.18b.19). His version of the story is a revision of the common one in which Dawn abandons her increasingly decrepit husband, who has been given eternal life without eternal youth.[47] For Propertius, however, her conduct toward her ever-aging husband is irreproachable (2.18b.9–10): "illum saepe suis descendens fovit in ulnis / nec prius abiunctos sedula lavit equos" ("Upon dismounting she often fondled him in her arms, nor was she careful to wash her untied horses first"). However, their erotic bliss is periodically interrupted by cosmic *officium,* which is resented bitterly by Dawn (13–14): "illa deos currum conscendens dixit iniquos, / invitum et terris praestitit officium" ("Mounting her chariot, she called on the adverse gods and offered her unwilling duty to the lands"). Dawn's *officium* forces her to leave Tithonus' bed each morning and its completion allows her to return to him, even to the partial neglect of her chores. Thus, the poet represents duty intruding upon the erotic world in this version, and the youthful Propertius, who identifies *a fortiori* with Tithonus, approves whatever steps are taken to minimize its deleterious effects on lovers.

47. For early versions of the story see *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite,* 218–38; Mimnermus 4 W.

The fourth use of *officium* is at 2.25. The poem begins with the lament of an aging lover, the poet/narrator, who compares his situation to that of Catullus and Calvus (3–4) and maintains that he will faithfully serve his mistress despite her cruelty. The poem continues with an address to an unnamed lover (21–38), who appears to be succeeding just where the narrator fails. He bewails his age, which has forced him to relinquish the position of his younger rival and concludes with an address to an anonymous group of men who favor a more promiscuous approach to love (2.25.39–40): "at, vos qui officia in multos revocatis amores, / quantus sic cruciat lumina nostra dolor!" ("But you who summon your duty to many loves, how greatly the grief tears at my eyes!"). The usage of *officium* here is euphemistic, similar to that of the Propertius of Book 2 who boasted that his *officium* was strong all night (2.22a.23–24). But the word's positive, life-affirming character is absent from this passage and it has become a source of pain for the beholder, who does not share in the prolific duties of his competitor(s). Here again, the ambivalence of *officium* appears due to the ultimate asymmetry of the political and erotic worlds. *Officium* is required for everyone in socio-political life, its precise obligations varying according to the status of the individual.[48] When *officium* is applied to the erotic life of an adult male citizen, however, the universal requirement to practice it disappears, since the narrator of 2.18 represents sexual activity as a zero-sum game without relative degrees of success. Instead, within the domain of eros the aging lover must compete directly and unsuccessfully with his younger, more attractive, rival. Thus, the ancient unsuccessful lover has no outlet for his duty and is erotically disenfranchised.

My final example shows with equal clarity the ambiguous status of duty in Propertius. It occurs in his long etiological account of why the Capitoline Hill is called the *mons tarpeius* and concerns the crime of Tarpeia, motivated here by her love for the Sabine commander Titus Tatius (4.4.1–2): "Tarpeium scelus et Tarpeiae turpe sepulchrum / fabor" ("Of the Tarpeian crime and the foul grave of Tarpeia I will speak"). The alliteration of the first line emphasizes the similarity of *turpe* and *Tarpeia,* but Propertius' disapproval of her is without conviction.[49] In fact, he suppresses the version of the story in which she betrays Rome for money, in favor of a Tarpeia motivated entirely by love. In addition, he gives her a long monologue in which she expresses her feelings, then describes her mental state

48. Hellegouarc'h, *Vocabulaire des relations,* 153: " . . . *officium* présente un caractère subjectif: la fonction n'est envisagée que liée à la personnalité de celui qui l'excerce." On its ubiquitousness see Cicero *De Officiis* 1.4: "neque publicis neque privatis neque forensibus neque domesticis in rebus, neque si tecum agas quid, neque si cum altero contrahas, vacare officio potest."

49. Editorial discomfort over his apparent sympathy for her is reflected in attempts to transpose lines 17–18: "nec satis una malae potuit mors esse puellae / quae voluit flammas fallere, Vesta, tuas" ("One death was not enough for the evil girl who wished to betray your flames, Vesta"). G. P. Goold, *Propertius Elegies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), 392, accepts Broekhuyzen's transposition of the lines from their received place in the poem to after the death of Tarpeia at line 92. Read in this way, the couplet offers a final emphatic comment on the justice of Tarpeia's fate that is otherwise absent.

in language borrowed from Vergil's sympathetic representation of Dido in *Aeneid* 4:[50]

> nam Vesta,[51] Iliacae felix tutela favillae,
> culpam alit et plures condit in ossa faces:
> illa furit, qualis celerem prope Thermodonta
> Strymonis abscisso pectus aperta sinu.
>
> For Vesta, happy nurse of Trojan embers,
> nourishes her fault and puts many torches in her bones:
> Tarpeia rages, as one on the bank of swift Thermodon,
> a Bacchante bare at the chest with her clothing torn.
> [4.4.69–72]

Propertius preserves Dido's Bacchic comportment and erotic flame, as well as the cynical exploitation of her desire by a goddess.[52] Tarpeia eventually betrays the city to her beloved Tatius, in hopes of a royal marriage. Instead, he savagely requites her services (90–92):

> "nube" ait "et regni scande cubile mei!"
> dixit, et ingestis comitum super obruit armis.
> haec, virgo, *officiis* dos erat apta *tuis*.
>
> "Wed," he said, "and mount the bed of my rule!"
> He spoke, and had her crushed beneath the piled shields of his men.
> Maiden, his gift matched your duty.

Tarpeia's erotic infatuation with Tatius, which drives her even to betray Rome, is a positive expression of her duty, and underscores Propertius' largely sympathetic portrayal of her. She rationalizes her passion by claiming that its consummation will result in peace.[53] Yet for Tatius, who perversely embodies the judgment of Rome against Tarpeia, the reverse is true. He is portrayed as sarcastic and cruel. He rewards *officium* with death for treason, a sentence that Tarpeia's erotic attachment cannot circumvent. Stahl writes: "The 'pastoral' world of love and peace has proved to be a truly foreign body in the material world which supplies the ingredients for the growth of the young Rome."[54] Duty, as Tarpeia conceives it, a happy union of eros with the state, is converted finally (and violently) into duty as seen by the state. Propertius, one might imagine, is not so sure about the fairness

50. For the version attributing Tarpeia's crime to greed see Livy 1.11.6–9. For Tarpeia as Dido compare Propertius 4.69–72 with *Aeneid* 4.300–303. See also Stahl, *"Love" and "War,"* 298.

51. The link is even close whether or not one accepts Kraffert's emendation of Vesta to Venus (Goold, Richardson). On the surface Venus seems a likelier instigator than Vesta in view of the connection of this passage to *Aeneid* 4, where it is she who is responsible for Dido's passion, and the erotic associations of fire. However, the ambiguous attributes of the Vestal flame and of the Vestal Virgins themselves must be acknowledged; see Mary Beard, "The Sexual Status of Vestal Virgins," *JRS* 70 (1980): 12–27, esp. 24–25.

52. For Vergil's systematic presentation of women and fire as representing a destructive irrationality in need of control, see Paul Allen Miller, "The Minotaur Within: Fire, the Labyrinth and Strategies of Containment in *Aeneid* 5 and 6," *CP* 90 (1995): 225–40.

53. 4.4.59–60: "commissas acies ego possum solvere nupta: / vos medium palla foedus inite mea."

54. *"Love" and "War,"* 302.

of this outcome. At the end of the poem he refers to her *iniustae . . . sortis* (96). Her grave, the *turpe sepulchrum* with which the poem began, and the name that accompanies it, are now sarcastically referred to as a *praemia* for the ever vigilant king of the gods. The poem that began so simply with the unproblematic pun on Tarpeia and *turpe* ends up with a far more ambiguous portrayal of her actions. At the center of this is the ambiguity of her *officium,* which she is never fully able to "liberate" from the grim world of war and politics and which finally destroys her as a result of her failure.

Roman poetry shared the language of Roman political institutions despite its professed preferences for *otium* and the protected spaces of leisure, banquet, and poetry. In so doing it was forced to contend directly with Roman political ideology and to attempt to secure for itself an equal or superior standing, while rhetorically representing itself as a marginal discourse at the fringes of traditional political life. At the same time, however, the price of such a strategy is necessarily high. Poetry can attempt to bypass the world of the city to a degree, by the impossible creation of a civilized pastoral wilderness where poetry remains in ideological purity. But it cannot speak the city's language without at the same time importing and acknowledging the city's authority. In Foucauldian language, poetry may challenge and decisively undermine the intrusive gaze of the city by sharing its characteristic strategies of representation, but by so doing it simultaneously crafts its own mechanism of self-surveillance.[55] In creating for itself a position of empowered otherness, poetry tacitly reinserts itself within the control of the political world it attempts to deny. The irony of this situation, I suspect, is not lost on Propertius, and explains the final line of 4.4, Propertius's sarcastic characterization of Tarpeia's unjust fate as Jupiter's just reward to her.[56]

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55. *History of Sexuality,* 1:44–45. See also my discussion, p. 211 above.

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