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Dear Luca

Thank you very much for the resubmission of your revised version.

I am happy to confirm that your article

Further thoughts on CIL IV, 5296 – CLE 950: Textual problems, structure, and gender issues

was accepted to be printed in Latomus after passing peer review.

Greetings

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***Further thoughts on CIL IV, 5296 – CLE 950:
Textual problems, structure, and gender issues***

Abstract

As the author has argued in a previous paper, *CIL IV, 5296* is a somewhat clumsy and incomplete transcription of a poem that has not been composed, but rather copied, by the writer of the graffito; its author – very likely a woman – possessed an adequate knowledge of Latin literary culture. Expanding on these conclusions, this study analyses some textual and prosodic problems, provides some insight into the compositional technique and structure of the short poem, and highlights the interest, as well as the uncertainties, of the gender issues raised by the text.

1. Introduction and background

CIL IV, 5296 is an intriguing graffito, and not only because it is one of the longest and most literarily ambitious *carmina Pompeiana*. This poem, in fact, is apparently one of the very few ancient documents that preserve the poetic voice of a woman; as such, its interpretation involves important issues relating to gender. Almost inevitably, however, this gendered interpretive lens has generated some controversial, and even biased, readings; the interpretation of the graffito is further complicated by several uncertainties concerning the text, and even by misunderstandings about the place where it was discovered.

Here are the transcription of the graffito and the translation provided by Courtney:¹

*o utinam liceat collo complexa tenere
braciola et teneris |² oscula ferre labellis.
i nunc, uentis tua gaudia, pupula, crede. |³
crede mihi, leuis est natura uirorum.
5 saepe ego cu(m) media |⁴ uigilare(m) perdita nocte
haec mecum medita(n)s: ‘multos |⁵ Fortuna quos supstulit alte,
hos modo proiectos subito |⁶ praecipitesque premit;*

¹ E. COURTNEY, *Musa Lapidaria. A Selection of Latin Verse Inscriptions*, Atlanta: Scholars Press 1995, p. 98 (text n. 92).

*sic Venus ut subito coiunxit |⁷ corpora amantum,
diuidit lux, et se |⁸
10 paries quid ama*

Would that I might hold my (your) arms embraced around your (my) neck and give kisses with my tender lips. Go now, poppet, and entrust your joys to the winds. Believe me, men's nature is fickle. When in my desperation I was lying awake in the middle of the night, often, thinking over things with myself, (I said) 'Many whom Fortune has raised aloft, these she subsequently oppresses, suddenly hurled down headlong. Similarly after Venus has suddenly united the bodies of lovers, daylight separates them...'

I have already analyzed IV, 5296 in a recent paper,² in which I argue that this graffito is only the rather clumsy, and partial, transcription of a poem whose author was not the same as person as the writer of the graffito. A philological analysis, therefore, can, and indeed should, suggest possible reconstructions of its original form, which would have been more correct both prosodically and syntactically. I also try to show that the poem, while certainly not among the best or most sophisticated specimens of Latin poetry, was, nonetheless, written by an author – very likely a woman – working with an adequate knowledge of Latin literary culture.

Though alternative readings have been proposed, it is hard to deny that the poem's speaking voice is that of a woman, and that it is another woman to whom she speaks.³ In 1939, Frank Olin Copley⁴ suggested that this poem is a *paraklausithyron*, a genre-classification that has since been adopted by several other scholars. Copley's suggestion rests almost exclusively on the mistaken assumption (originating from Bücheler's note to *CLE* 950) that this graffito was placed outside the door of the rather grand "doctor's house," located in the ninth *insula* of the ninth region of Pompeii. The inscription, however, was actually found in the doorway (that is, in a private space) of a much smaller and modest house of the same *insula*.⁵ The designation of *paraklausithyron* can,

² L. GRAVERINI, *Ovidian Graffiti: Love, Genre and Gender on a Wall in Pompeii. A New Study of CIL IV 5296 - CLE 950*, in *Incontri di Filologia Classica* 12, 2012-2013, pp. 1-28, first given as a lecture in Trieste in April 2013.

³ The concept of "author" is, itself, rather ambiguous here, since an anonymous inscription can have several authorial figures: the individual who wrote the words on the wall is not necessarily the same person who composed the poem, which composition can, in turn, be suspected of being just a cento of verses taken from other poems (more on this below, parts 3 and 4 of this paper). While there is, of course, no solid proof that this anonymous poem was composed by a woman, this seems to be a very plausible hypothesis, as it would be hard (although not impossible) to imagine why a male poet would choose to impersonate a woman who speaks affectionately to another woman and criticizes men's unreliability.

⁴ F.O. COPLEY, *A Paraklausithyron from Pompeii: A Study of C.I.L., IV, Suppl. 5296*, in *AJPh* 60, 1939, 333-349.

⁵ The plaster containing this and other inscriptions is now kept in the storerooms of the Museo Archeologico of Naples. The excavation reports (A. SOGLIANO, *VII. POMPEI – Degli edifici recentemente scoperti, e degli oggetti raccolti negli scavi dal dicembre 1887 al giugno 1888*, in *NSA*

therefore, be abandoned. The only other, very weak support of Copley's idea is the mention of a *paries* in v. 10 (l. 8 of the graffito), a cryptic and fragmentary line that has always baffled the interpreters. These words, however, are clearly written by a different hand; they are a partial quotation from Ovid's story of Pyramus and Thisbe (*Metamorphoses* IV, 73 *inuide – dicebant – paries, quid amantibus obstas?*), and have been left as a poetic comment by an unknown reader of the graffito.

Recently, Kristina Milnor has presented an independent analysis of *CIL* IV, 5296 in her monograph *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape in Roman Pompeii*.⁶ It appears that Milnor and I agree on a number of important points, such as the very likely female authorship of the poem, the identification of both speaker and addressee as women, the location of the graffito and some of its implications,⁷ and the nature of its last line. Many of our observations converge or confirm each other, and, as they are presented in thorough detail in our respective studies, there is no need to repeat them here. Instead, I will take the opportunity to discuss a few specific points of disagreement, and will also put forth some new ideas on the interpretation of this enigmatic text from Pompeii.

2. Two textual problems

Courtney, as well as many other scholars who have dealt with this poem, offers a faithful transcription of the graffito, but there are several dubious points of the text that require discussion. The metrical structure, for example, is highly irregular, with only vv. 1, 5 and 8 being perfect hexameters. I will address this more fully in the next section; for the moment, it is enough to note that simple emendations can fix the prosody in several cases. The irregular v. 2, for example, can be transformed into a good pentameter simply by changing *labellis* into *labris*, thus establishing an elegiac pattern at least at the beginning of the poem.

According to Milnor, "line 4... instead of being the pentameter one would expect if the couplet pattern were to continue, looks much more like a hexameter; indeed, it scans as one if we allow the 'e' in *levis* to be read as short rather than (as would be correct) long."⁸ This statement is rather surprising, since the *natura uirorum* is certainly *lëuis*

8, 1888, pp. 509-530; A. MAU, *Scavi di Pompei 1886-88. Insula IX, 7*, in *Röm. Mitt.* 4, 1889, pp. 3-31 and 101-125), as well as MAU's entry in the *CIL*, make it clear that the graffito was not in the "doctor's house." Its collocation in a private, rather than a public, space is suggested clearly enough by the same sources, and I have also confirmed it through an on-site inspection, as well as by analyzing the picture conveniently provided by A. VARONE, *Titulorum graphio exaratorum qui in C.I.L. vol. IV collecti sunt imagines*, 2 voll., Roma 2012, vol. 2 p. 437. Cf. GRAVERINI, *Ovidian Graffiti* [n. 2], pp. 15-17.

⁶ Oxford 2014, pp. 191-232: "Gender and Genre: The Case of *CIL* 4. 5296". A fuller bibliography on this *carmen Pompeianum* is available in each of our respective works; in what follows, I will only cite what is strictly necessary to this more selective study.

⁷ A vestige of COPLEY's characterization of the poem as a *paraklausithyron* can still be traced in MILNOR's analysis, in particular, when she speaks of the "imaginary lonely vigil [*sc.* of the lover] at her beloved's door" (p. 210).

⁸ MILNOR, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape* [n. 7], p. 207.

(“light, unreliable”) and not *lēuis* (“smooth, polished”): there can be little doubt, therefore, that this line is an incomplete hexameter.⁹ Does this incompleteness result from the work of an unskilled poet, or from that of a careless graffito writer who transcribed onto the wall some lines he did not perfectly remember? In his *CIL* entry, Augustus Mau implicitly, but clearly favors the latter hypothesis, as evidenced by his suggestion to integrate *pupula*, an emphatic repetition from the previous line, before *crede mihi*. I accepted his reconstruction of this line in my previous study, but I would like to argue here that other options can be found. One candidate for an integration, for example, is *Crocine*, the name of a woman who may have inhabited the house wherein the poem is inscribed;¹⁰ the resulting *crede mihi, Crocine* scans perfectly, offers an attractive sound effect (of a kind clearly favored by the author of the poem),¹¹ keeps the two *crede* close to each other (enhancing the rhetorical effect of repetition), and links the graffito to two other inscriptions on the same wall (greeting formulas addressing inhabitants and/or visitors of the house).¹² Indeed, an emendation that relies heavily on reconstructed real-life situations might appear a rather bold hypothesis;¹³ this discussion, however, can at least be used to show the wide range of possible conjectures – from a merely emphatic repetition such as *pupula* to a very concrete personal name – which would restore the hexameter in this line.

In fact, the whole poem is marred by mistakes that, in my opinion, are clearly the results of memory slips. A careless writer appears to have incorrectly reproduced someone else’s poem on the wall; and it is usually not too difficult to reconstruct – or, at least, to guess – the original form of this poem. As the various emendations made by the first editors of the graffito confirm, the state of this text actually solicits the intervention of a philologist, and it is indeed strange that after Sogliano, Mau and Bücheler,¹⁴ there

⁹ The only way to emend it into a pentameter would be to integrate a long syllable before or after *est*. I could not contrive such an integration, nor did I find any such suggestion in the previous literature.

¹⁰ The name of the woman is mentioned in *CIL* IV, 5298 *Ismarus Crocineni suae salutem*, as well as in *CIL* IV, 5297 *Crocine vale / Ismare vale* (this is the new reading provided by MAU in *CIL*; MILNOR, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape* [n. 7], p. 221 apparently follows SOGLIANO and MAU’s original reports, who read *Crocini*). Both inscriptions are in close proximity to IV, 5296.

¹¹ Cf. especially l. 7 *proiectos... praecipitesque premit*.

¹² On the dialogic nature of the graffiti on this wall, see GRAVERINI, *Ovidian Graffiti* [n. 2], p. 17 n. 56; more generally, on dialogues of graffiti at Pompeii, see R. BENEFIEL, *Dialogues of Ancient Graffiti in the House of Maius Castricius in Pompeii*, in *AJA* 104, 2010, pp. 59-101; and, by the same author, *Dialogues of Graffiti in the House of the Four Styles at Pompeii (Casa Dei Quattro Stili, 1.8.17, 11)*, in J.A. BAIRD, C. TAYLOR (eds.), *Ancient Graffiti in Context*, London 2010, pp. 20-48.

¹³ On the necessary caution when trying to reconstruct real-life situations which could provide a background for an inscription, see GRAVERINI, *Ovidian Graffiti* [n. 2], p. 17; MILNOR, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape* [n. 7], p. 224. As regards the integration suggested above, one might rightly wonder how the graffito writer could forget to write the name of the direct addressee of these verses. A possible answer could be that he was writing on behalf of somebody else, and did not personally know the addressee (or remember her name). In the end, the extremely speculative nature of any reconstruction of the hexameter is evident.

¹⁴ SOGLIANO, *Degli edifici recentemente scoperti* [n. 6]; MAU, *Scavi di Pompei* [n. 6]; MAU in the *Supplementum* II to the IV volume of the *CIL* (1909); F. BÜCHELER, *Anthologia latina siue poesis latinae supplementum*. Vol. 2: *Carmina epigraphica*, Leipzig 1895.

have been so few attempts at improving its shape. Most scholars have, it seems, been content to attribute its inconsistencies and difficulties to the sub-literary character that is often automatically attributed to Pompeian inscriptions.

This leads me to another textual problem for which I do not agree with Milnor's solution. At line 6 she supports Sogliano's emendation *medita<ri>s* for *meditas*,¹⁵ but this is unnecessary. If a main verb must be provided in this line, the irregular non-deponent form *meditas* can be retained, since metaplasms are not at all uncommon in literature, in everyday language, or, of course, in inscriptions.¹⁶ Both *meditas* and *medita<ri>s*, however, are suspect for three good reasons: a past tense and not a present would be expected in conjunction with the previous *cum... uigilarem*; the word order clearly suggests the *ego* of v. 5, and not an understood *tu*, as the subject; and finally, if this is a love poem, it would be difficult to reconcile the idea that the two lovers are meditating together (implied by *mecum meditas* or *medita<ri>s*), with the connotation of the previous *perdita* (the woman who speaks is in despair, and therefore presumably not enjoying the company of her beloved in the night). Though this third point is rather speculative and only has a literary character, the first two concern the appropriate usage of Latin: taken together, the strange word order and the wrong sequence of tenses put an excessive strain on the language, a strain that is unparalleled in other parts of this poem and clashes, in my opinion, with the literary erudition it exhibits.¹⁷

Most scholars after Mau and Bücheler, rather than accepting *meditas* or emending to *medita<ris>*, have instead supposed that a nasal has simply been omitted in this word (as often happens in this and other inscribed poems), and have printed *medita(n)s*.¹⁸ This lack of care for orthographic subtleties indeed places the graffito, though not necessarily the poem itself, at a sub-literary level. The resulting text leaves the sentence without a main verb,¹⁹ but it is easy to imagine that it has been lost with the final part of the poem; or different and better ways to restore it can be suggested. See, for example,

¹⁵ MILNOR, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape* [n. 7], p. 197-198. It is unclear to me, however, if she actually considers *medita<ri>s* as an emendation, as the angle brackets and the wording of her n. 16 suggest, or simply as an indication that "the author provides a non-deponent form of the verb, as is common in Pompeian graffiti" (p. 198).

¹⁶ Cf. e.g. COURTNEY, *Musa Lapidaria* [n. 1], p. 270 (on 48.2 *tutat*); 293 (on 70A.2 *nitant*); 330 (on 122.3 *imitare*). For an overview on the shift from deponent to active in Latin see P. FLOBERT, *Les verbes déponents latins des origines à Charlemagne*, Paris 1975, pp. 568-571; pp. 285-342 for a detailed analysis (p. 311 specifically on *medito*, attested in literary texts from the 3rd century CE). FLOBERT is very cautious in attributing these shifts to vulgarisms (p. 569), but that is, of course, a distinct possibility in certain texts, including many epigraphs (although COURTNEY, *Musa Lapidaria* [n. 1], p. 293 rightly suggests metrical reasons for the second case listed above).

¹⁷ See below, in the text, and nn. 26-28 for some details.

¹⁸ Cf. e.g. *cu(m)* and *uigilare(m)* in v. 5; *co(n)iuinxit* in v. 8.

¹⁹ G.P. GOOLD, *A Paraklausithyron from Pompeii*, in P. KNOX, C. FOSS (eds.), *Style and Tradition. Studies in Honor of Wendell Clausen*, Stuttgart-Leipzig 1998, pp. 16-29 unconvincingly considers *meditans* (*eram*) as equivalent to *meditabar* (p. 26), but cannot offer any parallels for this usage. Others, like COURTNEY, *Musa Lapidaria* [n. 1], understand "I said" after *meditans*, which seems slightly contradictory.

the tentative reconstruction of the whole poem offered at the end of this paper, where the missing main verb is supplied at v. 5.

3. Metrical anomalies and compositional technique

I have already pointed out that the metrical structure of the poem is irregular, with a seemingly random sequence of hexameters, both correct and faulty, and quasi-pentameters.²⁰ For Milnor, this likely results from the fact that the poem is a cento: “the writer quoted a couplet from one poem, with a following hexameter from the same or another text, followed by a differently sourced hexameter and some mangled couplets from somewhere else again.” This idea would also provide a possible explanation for some “dramatic shifts in tone, from the mincing and erotic diminutives of lines 1-2, to the gnomic but oddly counter-cultural idea expressed in line 4, to the sombre meditation on the vicissitudes of life found in lines 6-7” (208).²¹ Indeed, this is a compositional technique also attested in other Pompeian literary graffiti; and already Mau, in his *CIL* entry, considers IV, 5296 as a “carmen centonis uicem e variis quae poetriae mentem subibant fragmentis consutum, omissis additisque nonnullis ut panniculi coirent.”

While it is certainly possible that our poem is a (sort of) cento, I am skeptical about some of Milnor’s arguments. For example, Milnor puts a lot of weight on the end of v. 3 coinciding with the end of line 2 of the inscription. As the graffito is not organized according to metrical patterns at any other point, this unique coincidence would highlight the fact that the author of the cento switches to another poetic source after *uentis tua gaudia, pupula, crede*.²² There would also be other hints which might suggest that the end of v. 3 marks a sort of caesura in the poem: the sequence of two consecutive hexameters (instead of the expected sequence hexameter + pentameter) at vv. 3-4, the two different uses of *crede* (*uentis tua gaudia... crede / crede mihi*), the shift from *tua* to *mihi*, and the chiasmic arrangement of the terms. The first poetic fragment (vv. 1-3), then, would focus on the beloved *pupula*, the second (vv. 4 ff.) on the feelings of her lover.

In my opinion, however, the sophisticated use of the two imperatives *crede*, the shift from *tua* to *mihi* and the chiasm are, if anything, arguments against the presence of an intertextual caesura between vv. 3 and 4, as it would be difficult to assume that those elaborate rhetorical effects were created simply by juxtaposing quotations from different sources.²³ The series of two consecutive hexameters, moreover, should not be

²⁰ See above in the text for v. 2 emended into a pentameter; v. 7 is irregular, but the presence of a diaeresis that isolates the last three feet suggests that it is much more likely a mangled pentameter, as in my tentative reconstruction, than a hexameter.

²¹ The “counter-cultural” character of v. 4 is due to a gender reversal: in the elegiac tradition, women and not men are traditionally unreliable. Cf. also GRAVERINI, *Ovidian Graffiti* [n. 2], p. 5.

²² Obviously, this would also imply that the poem was inscribed on the wall by its author him/herself, an idea on which I have expressed some perplexity above.

²³ *CIL* 4.9847 (*Candida me docuit nigras odisse puellas / odero si potero si non inuitus amabo*), discussed by MILNOR, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape* [n. 7], p. 207, combines a slightly modified quotation from Propertius 1.1.5 (*donec me docuit castas odisse puellas*) with an exact one

overstressed: sequences of hexameters irregularly interrupted by pentameters are not at all rare in poetic inscriptions,²⁴ nor is the case unique in our poem, since vv. 5-8 are also, or can be easily emended into, hexameters. It would be uneconomical to hypothesize different sources for every missed couplet, especially since vv. 5-8 form a natural sequence of thoughts, despite the obvious problems in the text. I doubt, furthermore, that any literary or intertextual meaning can be attributed to the line endings of our graffito. The first line of the inscription is a bit shorter than the following ones, but the length of ll. 2-6 is rather uniform; ll. 7 and 8 are much shorter though not by design, since they are clearly incomplete. Most of all, it is noteworthy that all of the space on the wall to the right of our graffito was, as it seems, free from inscriptions. Below 5296, there are other short graffiti; the farthest to the right is 5297, whose two short lines have more or less the same right margin as 5296.²⁵ Apparently it was difficult or inconvenient to write to the right of these two inscriptions, perhaps because of some physical obstacle (possibly the door, since the inscriptions have been found on the right wall of a narrow doorway). In any case, it is quite likely that the coincidence of line and verse ending after *pupula crede* is simply due to chance or external factors, rather than to a deliberate design of the graffito writer.

On the whole, my arguments do not completely disprove the hypothesis that our poem is a cento, but they do encourage a more nuanced approach. In fact, it has long been noted that the poem contains at least one evident quotation, since v. 8 is adapted from Lucretius V, 962 *et Venus in siluis iungebat corpora amantum*;²⁶ I have also pointed out two probable allusions to a poem of Ovid's *Tristia* in vv. 6-7,²⁷ in addition to the adoption of several well-established poetic *topoi* and standard phrases;²⁸ and it is, of course, impossible to exclude quotations from and allusions to other literary pieces unknown to us, but popular at Pompeii. Our graffito is, perhaps, not a cento proper then, as the only recognizable quotation from another author is adapted to the new context, and the other possible references to previous texts are just allusive gestures and not quotations. All the same, the poem is, certainly, the result of intense intertextual exchange, and indeed it appears to be the work of a poet who relied heavily on the literary tradition when building her verses. I doubt, however, that the arrangement of the lines on the wall and the irregular succession of hexameters, would-be hexameters and would-be pentameters can actually help us identify the exact points at which our poet

from OVID, *Am.* 3.11.35, thus creating an original humorous effect. However, vv. 3-4 of our poem seem to be much more tightly connected to each other than the two verses by Propertius and Ovid in IV, 9847 (see below in the text).

²⁴ For partial lists of parallels see e.g. GOOLD, *A Paraklausithyron* [n. 19], p. 25 and COURTNEY, *Musa Lapidaria* [n. 1], p. 27.

²⁵ For a picture of the plaster containing these inscriptions see VARONE, *Titulorum imagines* [6], vol. 2 p. 437.

²⁶ COPLEY, *A Paraclausithyron* [n. 5], p. 348.

²⁷ III, 11, 67-68 *humanaeque memor sortis, quae tollit eosdem / et premit, incertas ipse uerere uices; 24 quilibet ignaui praecipitata premunt*. See GRAVERINI, *Ovidian Graffiti* [n. 2], pp. 6-7.

²⁸ See GRAVERINI, *Ovidian Graffiti* [n. 2], pp. 2-8 for details.

switches from one source to another. As regards vv. 3-4 in particular, I find that the sequence of thought is acceptable, if we allow for a sort of *hysteron proteron*: men are all unreliable (v. 4), hence the irony of the poet's suggestion that the *pupula* entrust them with her joy, when she would do just as well to entrust it to the winds (v. 3). I doubt, therefore, that there is any evident caesura between these lines.²⁹

4. Gender issues

One cannot overstate the exceptionality of a poem in which one woman talks to another woman about their shared feelings and the unreliability of men. In fact, several previous studies have tried, either explicitly or implicitly, to “normalize” the gender relationships in *CIL IV*, 5296. As a result, strained interpretations of the text have sometimes been adopted, in order to fit the poem into an elegiac tradition in which speaking voices are usually male, and women are the source of their sorrows.³⁰ Milnor, instead, argues from the opposite pole, claiming that these verses are about lesbian love. She also finds support for this idea in her assessment of the poem as a cento:³¹ lesbian desire, her argument goes, had no space in the elegiac tradition; it is, therefore, hard to imagine that another poem on this subject circulated, and was popular enough in Pompeii to inspire this graffito. The cento-structure of our poem would, thus, be functional to the author's attempt at adapting the heterosexual *topoi* of the elegiac tradition to a homosexual situation; this would be accomplished by combining two (or more) different poems, one which addresses a female beloved and another wherein a female lover expresses her feelings.

Now, if one follows the assumption that our graffito is a cento on lesbian love, and that its author is “one who did not necessarily compose the individual lines which make up *CIL IV*, 5296, but who is responsible for their selection and presentation on the wall” (213), then Milnor's analysis is certainly tenable. As regards the compositional technique that Milnor hypothesizes for our graffito, however, I have expressed some doubts above, and have also suggested that the author of these verses can hardly be the same person who transcribed them so poorly onto the wall of a Pompeian house. I do agree that this poem can be interpreted as an expression of lesbian love, and that the elegiac tradition played an important role in its composition. Yet, it should be stressed that this poem *can* be about lesbian love; but this possibility can hardly be supported (or disproved) by any assumption regarding the manner of composition of the poem itself. In order to decide if *CIL IV*, 5296 actually *is* about lesbian love, two questions must be

²⁹ In another context, MILNOR herself argues cogently and convincingly for the tight connection between these two lines (*Graffiti and the Literary Landscape* [n. 7], pp. 215-217). She similarly glosses these two lines with “go ahead and entrust your happiness to the winds, little girl; believe me, you won't find a reliable man.”

³⁰ See MILNOR, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape* [n. 7], pp. 196-206; GRAVERINI, *Ovidian Graffiti* [n. 2], pp. 17-18 and *passim*.

³¹ MILNOR, *Graffiti and the Literary Landscape* [n. 7], pp. 212 ff.

addressed. Firstly, is it the voice of a single speaker, namely the woman of v. 5 (*perdita*), which pervades the entire poem, or can some sections (specifically the first two lines, which express the desire of hugging and kissing a female addressee) be attributed to a different, possibly male, speaker? Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, are the first two lines an expression of lesbian desire, or does the poem speaker only want to express her sympathy to a lovelorn friend, both with warm and affectionate gestures and by sharing some thoughts on the unreliability of men?

Given that Milnor and I agree that there is only one speaking voice in the poem, there is no need to repeat our arguments here. Milnor, however, does not explicitly address the second question. The idea of a poem on lesbian love should certainly not be dismissed merely on the grounds of its exceptionality, a tack taken by several scholars in the past. Yet, the fact that the poem is incomplete, as is our knowledge of social conventions among ancient Romans, should urge interpreters to keep an open mind. There is no need to demonstrate that all of the expressions used in the first two lines could be well suited to an erotic context; the problem is rather that they might suit other contexts as well. Thus, if we focus on lesbian love alone, we might succumb to a sort of tunnel vision.

There are, of course, several situations in which hugs and *oscula* could be appropriate: to name a few, a passionate erotic relationship, the meeting of two friends, a mother or father expressing their affection for a child. When a kiss is explicitly placed on somebody's lips,³² it is usually more erotically charged, but not necessarily so. I have already discussed this ambiguity in my previous paper, but there are a few references that I would like to add here. In Vergil, *Aen.* I, 256, Jupiter kisses Venus before he reassures her concerning the destiny of the Trojans; Vergil's words are *oscula libauit natae*, which Austin renders "he lightly touched his daughter's pretty lips with a kiss." Servius' commentary clearly shows that, at some point in time, the image of a father kissing his daughter's lips, however lightly, became a disturbing image for Vergil's readers:

OSCVLA LIBAVIT leuiter tetigit. et sciendum osculum religionis esse, sauium uoluptatis. quamuis quidam osculum filiis dari, uxori basium, scorto sauium dicant. sane multi nolunt ita intellegi, ut summum osculum filiae dederit, id est non pressum, sed summa labella contingens, sed ita aiunt: tum hilarus Iuppiter uultus natae libauit, id est contigit, scilicet ut nos solemus cum blandimentis quibusdam sinistram maxillam contingere liberorum ac deinde ad os nostrum dextram referre. ergo 'libauit' merito, quia partem uultus, non totos contigerat, ut 'oscula' dixerit quasi minora et teneriora filiae ora, ut ora diminutiuè oscula; nam ora uultus dici, ut "intentione ora tenebant" et "sic ora ferebat." ipse

³² There are very good reasons to believe that *oscula ferre labellis* means to kiss *on*, not *with* the lips as some scholars have understood: see GRAVERINI, *Ovidian Graffiti* [n. 2], pp. 3-4.

diminutiue oscula dixit minores et teneros uultus “summaque per galeam delibans oscula fatur.”

For the sake of my argument, the point is not so much to determine whether Vergil meant to describe Jupiter kissing Venus’ lips or her cheeks, as it is to point out that “many,” according to the *Servius auctus* (whose supplement starts at *quamvis quidam*), took pains to demonstrate that the former was not the case. It is sufficiently clear that both the expression and the act were ambiguous: kissing somebody’s lips could simply be a fatherly gesture of affection, but could also be deemed inappropriate in the context of Jupiter’s dialogue with Venus – in particular, perhaps, because it was the goddess of love herself receiving the kiss.

A kiss, clearly, could have different meanings in different contexts, both literary and socio-cultural. It is true that our poem focuses on the “softness” of the addressee’s lips, but the implications of phrases like *teneris... labellis* (or *labris*) are not univocal. While there is a clearly erotic atmosphere in passages such as Plautus, *Ps.* 67 *teneris labellis molles morsiunculae* or Ovid, *Ars* 1.667-668 [sc. *oscula*] *tantum ne noceant teneris male rapta labellis, / neque queri possit dura fuisse, caue*, “soft lips” are also typical of young children,³³ and Ovid seems to experiment with possible shifts from filial to erotic love in *Epist.* 16.255-256 (Paris to Helen) *oscula si natae dederas, ego protinus illa / Hermiones tenero laetus ab ore tuli*. Kissing lips could be defined as “soft” without implying any sexual desire – at least, not directly.³⁴ Could “soft lips” also be attributed to a friend whom one wishes to kiss? No extant sources explicitly confirm this possibility, but the parallels cited above do, at least, suggest that the idea is not absurd. The term *osculum* can itself be used to define both a friendly, primarily affectionate kiss,³⁵ as well as the sort exchanged between lovers during heated, erotic intercourse. In the latter case, however, the kiss is often explicitly qualified: cf. e.g. Ovid, *Am.* II, 5, 23-28 *inproba tum uero iungentes oscula uidi – / illa mihi lingua nexa fuisse liquet – / qualia non fratri tulerit germana seuro, / sed tulerit cupido mollis amica uiro; / qualia credibile est non Phoebos ferre Dianam, / sed Venerem Marti saepe tulisse suo.*³⁶

³³ Cf. e.g. young Opheltes in STATIUS, *Theb.* IV, 797 *et teneris meditans uerba inluctantia labris*; Camilla fed at a mare’s udder in VERGIL, *Aen.* XI, 572 *armentalis equae mammis et lacte ferino / nutribat teneris immulgens ubera labris*.

³⁴ Cf. also, with an ironic slant, MARTIAL VII, 95, 7-8 *hoc me frigore basiet nec uxor, / blandis filia nec rudis labellis* (comparing the welcome kisses of a wife and a young daughter to the repulsive *oscula niualia* of a certain Linus, who used to kiss all those he encountered). A very ironic treatment of the thin boundaries between filial affection and erotic desire is in LONGUS III, 9, 5, where Daphnis “thought it pleasant to sleep even with Chloe’s father, so he embraced him and kissed him often and dreamed he was doing all this to Chloe.”

³⁵ In familial contexts, cf. e.g. *Epic. Drusi* 33-35 *Obuia progrediar felixque per oppida dicar / Colloaque et hoc oculos illius ore premam. / Talis erit, sic occurret, sic oscula iunget*. As a form of salutation, cf. e.g. SENECA, *De ira* IV, 24, 1 *ille me parum humane salutauit; ille osculo meo non adhaesit*.

³⁶ On the history and nuances of the Latin vocabulary of kissing, see e.g. PH. MOREAU, *Osculum, basium, sauium*, in *RPh* 52, 1978, pp. 87-97; G. CIPRIANI, *Il vocabolario latino dei baci*, in *Aufidus* 15, 1992, pp. 69-102.

As regards relationships between same-sex adults, at least some sources provide insight into the social parameters involved when men kiss each other, for which reason it is often possible to distinguish between friendly, social and erotic kisses.³⁷ Unfortunately, we are not well informed regarding kisses between women.³⁸ One notable exception is to be found in Petronius' *Satyrica*: at 67, 5 Trimalchio's wife, Fortunata, joins her friend, Scintilla, at her table, greets her and kisses her (*applicat se illi toro, in quo Scintilla Habinnae discumbibat uxor, osculataque plaudentem*: "Est te," inquit, "uidere?"); after a few drinks, at 67, 11, the two women get more excited and exchange more passionate kisses (*interim mulieres sauciae inter se riserunt ebriaeque iunxerunt oscula, dum altera diligentiam matris familiae iactat, altera delicias et indiligentiam uiri. Dumque sic cohaerent...*). Fortunata does not seem to consider her behavior too dissolute, since while kissing her friend she also boasts her own virtues as a *mater familias*; Scintilla's husband, however, clearly has some objections to the two women's conduct and brusquely interrupts them (67, 12).³⁹ A counterpart of this scene is 74, 8 – 75, 7, where Trimalchio *osculari diutius coepit* one of his young slaves; this arouses Fortunata's jealousy, and Trimalchio claims he kissed the boy *non propter formam, sed quia frugi est*. Of course, in a text as deeply comic and ironic as the *Satyrica*, one should never take the explicit motivations of characters at face value; and we should not forget that the conduct of Scintilla's husband is not necessarily a faithful representation of how Romans usually reacted when confronted with a public demonstration of affection shared between women (if such a generalization is even possible).⁴⁰ On a general level, nonetheless, I think that Petronius at least offers us a good example of the possible ambiguities of behaviors such as those described in *Satyrica* 67, and of the rather thin line which separates socially acceptable

³⁷ See e.g. R. HAWLEY, 'Give me a thousand kisses': the kiss, identity, and power in Greek and Roman antiquity, in *LICS* 6, 2007, pp. 1-15 for a first approach to the subject and further references.

³⁸ L. AUANGER (*Glimpses through a Window: An Approach to Roman Female Homoeroticism through Art Historical and Literary Evidence*, in N.S. RABINOWITZ, L. AUANGER (eds.), *Among Women: From the Homosocial to the Homoerotic in the Ancient World*, Austin 2002, pp. 211-255), after pointing out that "the sexual aspect of women's relationships is not frequently present in Roman representations," also warns that "the depiction of female homoeroticism in Roman times may be more in line with a definition of female friendship that has not been the object of extensive academic consideration" (pp. 211-212).

³⁹ For a discussion of the literary and social aspects of this episode see S. BOEHRINGER, *L'homosexualité féminine dans l'antiquité grecque et romaine*, Paris 2007, pp. 314-321; see also E. CANTARELLA, *Secondo natura. La bisessualità nel mondo antico*, Roma 1988, p. 212, who points out that Fortunata is a prostitute – exactly the kind of women one could suspect of having lesbian inclinations.

⁴⁰ The only other literary source for women kissing each other is, to my knowledge, LUCIAN's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* 5, 3 (on which see S.P. HALEY, *Lucian's "Leaena and Clonarium": Voyeurism or a Challenge to Assumptions?*, in N.S. RABINOWITZ and L. AUANGER (eds.), *Among Women. From the Homosocial to the Homoerotic in the Ancient World*, Austin 2002, pp. 286-303, p. 196). Displays of affection or love by women, apparently, could not find much space in literature, and were probably considered inappropriate or at least unusual in higher social circles. On the typical Roman denial of the cultural reality of female homoeroticism, see J.P. HALLETT, *Female Homoeroticism and the Denial of Roman Reality in Latin Literature*, in J.P. HALLETT and M.B. SKINNER (eds.), *Roman Sexualities*, Princeton (NJ) 1977, pp. 255-273.

signs of affection (67, 5 *osculata*) from erotic desire (67, 11 *iunxerunt oscula... cohaerent*).

Ultimately, it is important to remember that *CIL* IV, 5296 is only a fragment, and that vv. 1-2 describe warm and affectionate gestures that are not erotically charged in any explicit way. While it does remain a possibility to read this graffito as a rare poetic expression of Sapphic desire, it is more prudent to keep an open mind and allow for the alternative possibility that it simply voices a woman's concern for a lovelorn friend. This said, it may be unwise to presuppose a simple binary opposition between erotic and non-erotic, between lesbian desire and friendly relations, as the only available interpretive choices for this fragment. Our poem might be more fruitfully placed somewhere in the continuum between "homosocial" and "homoerotic," the two poles defined by Lisa Auanger in her carefully nuanced assessment of ancient literary sources and visual artifacts which provide evidence of relationships between women.⁴¹ *CIL* IV, 5296 would be not too different, in its ambiguities, from the fragment of a sarcophagus, which Auanger describes as depicting "a pair of female musicians strolling and sharing an instrument, one with her arm around the shoulder of another, like young lovers or close friends whose interaction includes the physical."⁴² A more nuanced approach, in fact, would certainly not diminish the exceptionality and importance of this text, a literary piece arguably authored by a woman, and in which a woman talks to a female addressee about her personal feelings.

Appendix: a tentative reconstruction

As a support to the previous discussion I reproduce here the tentative reconstruction of this poem I have offered in my previous paper, followed by an adaptation of Courtney's translation:⁴³

*o utinam liceat collo complexa tenere
braciola et teneris oscula ferre labris.
I nunc, <et> ventis tua gaudia, pupula, crede:
<pupula>, crede mihi, levis est natura virorum.
5 Saepe ego sub media vigilabam, perdita, nocte
haec mecum meditans: "multos [Fortuna] quos supstulit ante,
Fors modo proiectos [subito] praecipitesque premit;*

⁴¹ AUANGER, *Glimpses through a Window* [n. 38], p. 212: "the 'homoerotic' consists of behaviors and words that constitute a variety of situations, such as relationships expressing deep personal attachments between women, ranging from romantic friendships that include emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical ties, to brief physical encounters without commitment to normative everyday interaction that includes varying degrees of physicality and closeness. The 'homosocial' includes some of the same but does not necessarily include or exclude an erotic or even physical component."

⁴² AUANGER, *Glimpses through a Window* [n. 38], p.228, referring to her fig. 7.3 at p. 229.

⁴³ GRAVERINI, *Ovidian Graffiti* [n. 2], pp. 14-15, to which I refer for a full discussion and bibliography.

*sic Venus ut subito coniunxit corpora amantum,
divellit lux, et se...*

Would that I might hold your arms embraced around my neck and give kisses to your tender lips. Go now, poppet, and entrust your joys to the winds: poppet, believe me, men's nature is fickle. Often in my desperation I was lying awake in the middle of the night, thinking to myself 'Many whom Fortune has raised aloft, these she subsequently oppresses, suddenly hurled down headlong. Similarly after Venus has suddenly united the bodies of lovers, daylight separates them...'⁴⁴

⁴⁴ My deepest gratitude goes to my friend and colleague Ben Lee, who offered extremely useful insights. He and Amanda Jarvis also revised my English.