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Graffiti & the Literary Landscape in Roman Pompeii

KRISTINA MILNOR

OXFORD

GRAFFITI AND THE LITERARY LANDSCAPE
IN ROMAN POMPEII

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*For LDS and IEMS
You taught me to believe
not in permanence, but immortality*

Preface

Candida me docuit nigras odisse puellas.
odero se potero, se non invitus amabo.

A fair girl taught me to hate dark girls.
I will hate if I can; if not, I will not love unwillingly.

(CIL 4. 1520)

This couplet is one of hundreds of snippets of poetry preserved on the walls of the ancient Roman city of Pompeii, fragments which range from a few metrical feet of hexameter to fully fledged texts in ten or twelve lines. The verses are typical of Pompeii's 'literary' graffiti, those whose form, diction, or sentiment point to the influence of canonical Latin literature. This text was scratched into the atrium wall plaster of a well-appointed house in Pompeii's fashionable sixth region, and it is composed of hexameters drawn from two famous elegiac poets of the early Roman Empire. Erotic in content, sentimental, and perhaps a little banal, the text has drawn little attention from critics, with the exception of those who see it as a prime example of the ways in which such popular poetry is born from, but compares unfavourably with, the great early imperial poetry enshrined in the Latin literary canon. It has long been recognized that CIL 4. 1520 is composed of a line adapted from Propertius (1. 1. 4–6: *Amor . . . donec me docuit castas odisse puellas/improbis*) and a line from Ovid (*odero se potero si non invitus amabo: Amores* 3. 11. 35). The 'couplet' is actually two hexameters ripped from their original context and cobbled together to form a new poem. Additionally, although the verse is shaped by a clear metrical schema, on the wall two hexameters are broken into three written lines. Even worse, those lines are not even divided according to the metrical foot, as the first leaves off in the middle of the hexameter's fourth foot, and the second after two syllables of the fifth. The author, critics have concluded, did not know, or care, to write his poem on the wall correctly—proof positive of a lack of education, intelligence, or taste.

Such a judgement is typical of scholarship on Pompeii's literary graffiti, which have both attracted and repelled critical interest since

their discovery in the middle of the nineteenth century. The presence of hundreds of poetic texts inscribed on the walls of the ancient city led some early commentators to characterize Pompeii as a paradise of scholar-poets, all furiously engaged in scribbling their compositions on any material which came to hand. Subsequent scholars, however, tended to dismiss the graffiti as a source for investigating ancient literary culture, seeing them simply as examples of the distortion which affects 'real' literature as it passes into the popular imagination, where it is consumed and reproduced by those not fully competent to understand it. In recent years, though, there has been increasing interest in non-elite cultural production, particularly in the visual arts. Art historians have convincingly argued that ancient paintings found in 'popular' contexts have a stylistic language of their own, one which is different from, but not necessarily inferior to, that of the canonical objects of scholarly study. But although important work has been done on Pompeii's unique collection of popular visual arts, the methodological sea-change has not yet reached the city's store of popular textual art. In this study, I argue that the literary graffiti are more than the simple 'distortions' of canonical literature; rather, they have their own modes of expression, metrical patterns, and styles of language as meaningful in their own terms as those of the great Roman authors who populated the graffiti writers' imaginations.

To return to *CIL* 4.1520, it is worth noting that the couplet is preserved along with a 'signature', written neatly below in what appears to be the same hand: *scripsit Venus fisica Pompeiana* ('Venus "fisica" of Pompeii wrote [this]'). This is a joke, but—I argue—a learned one. *Fisica* is indeed one of the epithets of the goddess as she was worshipped at Pompeii (see, for example, *CIL* 10. 928, a dedicatory inscription), but here the epithet, which derives from the Greek *physicus* ('physical'), is particularly apt. Pompeii's own goddess of bodily love claims authorship of a poem about bodily love, in a kind of linguistic playfulness familiar to readers of Roman elegy. Also self-conscious, I argue, are the 'errors' which the graffiti-writer committed in scratching his hexameter lines on the wall. By breaking his verse after *nigras* rather than at the end of the hexameter, the writer underscores the central theme of the verse, namely the contrast between light and dark, now the first and last words of the inscribed line. Moreover, by changing Propertius' original *castas* to *nigras*, and reassigning the responsibility for the change from *Amor* to *candida*, the graffiti writer puts the emphasis on appearance rather

than morality, and on real-world experience rather than Propertius' programmatic encounter with Love. Whereas Cupid has made Propertius 'hate chaste girls' because they neither succumb to love poetry nor make appropriate subjects for it, Venus Fisica—a different god of love—emphasizes both the visual element of desire, and the folly in announcing the blanket rejection of any category of attractive persons. Moreover, in *Amores* 3. 11, Ovid bemoans the fact that his mistress' morals are reprehensible, but her beauty forever draws him back (3. 11b. 37–8)—a celebration of appearance over character of which Venus Fisica would apparently approve. What Ovid 'learns' in *Amores* 3. 11 has been retrospectively applied to Propertius' categorization of desirable girls.

CIL 4. 1520 thus offers one illustration of how literary graffiti do not simply repeat but actually rewrite canonical literature. Although the sentiment of the graffito remains within the ironic erotic discourse of elegy, the fact that it manipulates quotations from Propertius and Ovid shows both a real familiarity with and a sense of ownership of texts generally assumed to have circulated only within the elite upper class. It is certainly true that we have no way of knowing exactly whose hands inscribed Pompeii's graffiti, but the sheer volume of writings and their multiple contexts argue for a more popular authorship and readership than scholars have generally been willing to believe. But perhaps more important for my purposes is the fact that, regardless of who actually wrote ancient graffiti, the general assumption among ancient Romans was that they were popularly authored: representations of graffiti in canonical literature, from Plautus to Pliny the Younger, all underscore the idea that the wall texts represent a kind of *vox populi*, anonymous and, more often than not, critical of dominant cultural mores. Although there is a danger in using elite texts to read non-elite culture, I think that it is important to recognize the extent to which the graffiti texts are performative of their own popularism—that is, how they both are and wish to be understood as resistant readings of canonical texts. It is in this theft and redeployment of high literary texts, I think, that we may find an important alternative view of what cultural production meant in the early Roman Empire.

A few technical notes. A different version of Chapter 5 was published in W. A. Johnson and H. N. Parker (eds), *Ancient Literacies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 288–319 under the title 'Literary Literacy in Roman Pompeii'; the first two sections of

Chapter 1 appeared in *Ramus* 40.2 (2011) 198–222 as ‘Between Epitaph and Epigram: Pompeian Graffiti and the Latin literary Tradition’. The abbreviations of journal titles used in this book are those suggested by the *American Journal of Archaeology*. I have generally followed the readings which are found in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* (*CIL*), supplemented by autopsy where the texts are still extant. In providing the texts, I have followed the editorial conventions used in *CIL* and described in Bodet (2001) pp. xxv–xxvi. All photographs of Pompeii and the material remains now housed in the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli are used by permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali—Soprintendenza Speciale per i Beni Archeologici di Napoli e Pompei.

This study began—more years ago now than I care to count—as an exploration of literary materiality, by which I do not mean the history of the book but rather the relationship between the physical world and the artistic production of text. Like all interdisciplinary projects, it thus necessitated my wandering into unfamiliar areas of research, and I accumulated even more debts than is usual in the course of writing a book. I do not doubt that I have forgotten to thank someone, for which I am deeply sorry; I have relied a great deal on the kindness of strangers in this process and am enormously grateful to each and every one of you. That said, I need to begin with a general thank you to the many students and faculty of at least twenty different institutions in four different countries who listened to oral presentations of the material in the following chapters. Without their patient questioning and insightful comments, this would be a far inferior book. The research for and production of the manuscript was also generously supported by grants from a number of institutions: the American Academy in Rome, the Lodge Fund of Columbia University, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, NJ. My home base, Barnard College, also provided financial backing for research trips and leave time to write. On a more personal level, I would also like to offer my heartfelt thanks to Rebecca Benefiel, Heikki Solin, Jeremy Hartnet, Elizabeth Marlowe, Molly Pasco-Pranger, Anne Coulson, Lexi Eberspacher and the rest of the staff at the American Academy in Rome, Luciano Pedicini, Richard Fletcher, Aude Doody, Sam Woolley, Helene Foley, Nancy Worman, Elizabeth Castelli, Alan Cameron, James Zetzel, Katharina Volk, Helen Morales, Simon Goldhill, Tony Boyle, Bryan Burns,

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K.M.

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xv
<i>List of Plates</i>	xvii
Introduction	1
Material matters	9
Speaking and writing	20
What's 'literary' about literary graffiti?	32
1. Landscape and Literature in the Roman City	45
Authorship and authority	49
Between epitaph and epigram	60
Image and text in the Pompeian cityscape	77
2. Poetic Politics, Political Poetics	97
Poetic politics	104
Political poetics	118
3. Authorship, Appropriation, Authenticity	137
Tiburinus and 'the author effect'	141
Naming names: identity and epistolography in Pompeian graffiti	159
Fragmentary thinking, speaking, and writing	175
4. Gender and Genre: The Case of <i>CIL</i> 4. 5296	191
No place for a woman: in search of the female voice of <i>CIL</i> 4. 5296	196
Meter and material	206
Love, sex, materiality	218
Appendix 4.1: On the location of <i>CIL</i> 4. 5296	224

5. A Culture of Quotation: Virgil, Education, and Literary Ownership	233
Arms and the man	238
Speaking out	252
<i>Appendix 5.1: Quotations from Virgil on Pompeian walls</i>	263
Conclusion	273
<i>Works Cited</i>	279
<i>Index of Sources</i>	299
<i>General Index</i>	306

List of Illustrations

0.1. Map of Pompeii, showing numbers of <i>regiones</i> and <i>insulae</i>	16
0.2. Line drawing of <i>CIL</i> 4. 1595	27
0.3. Line drawings of <i>CIL</i> 4. 1904 and 2461	30
1.1. Pompeian wall fresco outside the Porta Vesuviana	56
1.2. Pompeian wall fresco, located on street between 7. 11. 12 and 13	59
1.3. Line drawing of <i>CIL</i> 4. 8899	65
1.4. Line drawing of <i>CIL</i> 4. 9123	70
1.5. Fragment of plaster showing <i>CIL</i> 4. 2360	74
1.6. Shop sign outside 9. 7. 7	78
1.7. Plan of house 7. 2. 44–6 (Casa dell’Orso Ferito)	81
1.8. Shop sign from Caupona of Euxinus (1. 11. 10–11)	82
1.9. Fresco from Caupona of Salvius with added graffiti	85
1.10. Map of the Caupona of Euxinus	88
1.11. Line drawing of <i>CIL</i> 4. 1520	92
1.12. Line drawing of <i>CIL</i> 4. 1645 and 1649	94
2.1. Pompeian programmata	103
2.2. Fresco of Pero and Micon from Pompeii 5. 4. a (House of M. Lucretius Fronto)	111
2.3. Programma inside doorway of Pompeii 1. 7. 1	113
2.4. Line drawing of <i>CIL</i> 4. 1939	125
2.5. Plan of 9. 13. 1–3 (House of Julius Polybius)	129
2.6. Detail of plaster fragment showing graffiti from the House of Julius Polybius (9. 13. 1–3)	134
3.1. Detail of plaster fragment showing Tiburtinus’ signature	145
3.2. Detail of plaster fragment showing hatch marks separating Tiburtinus’ epigrams 8–11	146
3.3. Line drawing of <i>CIL</i> 4. 1893–4	152
3.4. Plaster fragment with <i>quid pote tan</i> written to the left of <i>CIL</i> 4. 1893–4	155
3.5. Line drawing of <i>CIL</i> 4. 1852	168
3.6. Line drawing of <i>CIL</i> 4. 1227	183

3.7. Plaster fragment preserving <i>CIL</i> 4. 1824	185
3.8. Fresco showing writing instruments and scroll	188
4.1. Line drawing of <i>CIL</i> 4. 5296	198
4.2. Line drawing of <i>CIL</i> 4. 5092	205
4.3. Detail of plaster fragment preserving <i>CIL</i> 4. 5296–8	221
4.4. Facade of ‘House 6’ (Pompeii 9. 9. 6)	226
4.5. Plan of Pompeii 9. 9. 5–7	227
5.1. Plaster fragment preserving <i>CIL</i> 4. 733	235
5.2. Fresco showing Aeneas fleeing Troy with Anchises and Ascanius (‘The Trojan Group’)	239
5.3. M. Della Corte, drawing of <i>CIL</i> 4. 7129–31	243
5.4. Line drawing of <i>CIL</i> 4. 9131	249
5.5. Plaster fragment preserving <i>CIL</i> 4. 1841	256

List of Plates

- Plate 1. Detail of plaster fragment showing graffiti from the House of Julius Polybius (9. 13. 1–3)
- Plate 2. Plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 4966–73
- Plate 3. Detail of plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 4966
- Plate 4. Detail of plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 4967–70
- Plate 5. Detail of plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 4971–3
- Plate 6. Plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 1893–8
- Plate 7. Plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 5296–9
- Plate 8. Detail of plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 5296

Introduction

Public Service Announcement

It may be helpful to remember that
things have not always been as they are;
this may be obvious as it sounds, easy to forget
walking concrete paths and
perceiving streams of traffic and rectangular shelters.
It may be helpful to keep in mind that at one time
these constructions were non-existent.
It may be of some use to look over
all that you can see now, the
expanse and boundaries
of your environment, and think how all
of this will be gone
one day
eaten
and reapplied.
It may be helpful to see beauty
in decomposition; because like
the leaves of trees turn bright and fall
to the ground to replenish
their mother, it is also our inescapable
privilege to rot.
So now it becomes necessary to
view all items
in the world as reflections, all objects as mirrors,
and then move upon this basis.

Anonymous graffiti text from Sutro Baths,
San Francisco, c.1992

Photographed and transcribed by
Cheryl Barton, FSLA, FAAR '04

Graffiti wall writing has a very long history. Texts from Egypt's late Middle Kingdom, including some fairly extensive 'literary' compositions, appear scratched into the rock walls along trade routes in the Western Desert;¹ homoerotic graffiti dating to the seventh or sixth century BCE have been discovered on Thera at the sanctuary of Apollo Karneios;² graffiti were written on the walls of early Christian

catacombs, of medieval churches, and of early modern houses.³ The signatures of visitors to the Domus Aurea in Rome during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries can still be seen scratched into the plaster, as can those of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century tourists at other ancient sites around the Mediterranean. Some graffiti in the modern day have taken on a distinctive style, especially following the birth of New York subway ‘spraycan art’ in the late 1970s, but other less colourful forms still persist: almost every public bathroom on a modern college campus provides examples of love notes, admonitions, jokes, pleas, political opinions, and existential ramblings. The poem which I quoted as the epigraph to this chapter was painted in large letters on the ruins of the Sutro Baths, outside of San Francisco, and is noteworthy for the ways in which it plays on the traditions of graffiti writing. Badly spelled and grammatically uneven, it still has a kind of gnomic grandeur as it celebrates the urban decay of which it itself is a part. Like many graffiti, the poem proved to be as ephemeral as it advertises, and has subsequently disappeared under the onslaught of rain, wind, and subsequent visitors to the site.

Yet to label all of these different texts ‘graffiti’—as I have just done—is to assume a stable category where none in fact exists. Etymologically, the word comes from the Italian *graffio*, ‘to scratch or carve’, but many of the more modern examples I have described were written in ink or paint. *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* defines graffiti as ‘unauthorized writing or drawing on a public surface’,⁴ but in the sixteenth century books were published which included sample poems to be written on walls in different rooms of the house, thus challenging the idea that what we see as graffiti must always be ‘unauthorized’ or found in public space.⁵ Certainly, graffiti can be distinguished from canonical literature in the sense that they are emphatically material, fixed in time and place, and are thus as much objects as texts. At the same time, however, a graffito is clearly something different from (to use an ancient example) an inscription

¹ Darnell (2002) 89–162.

² Although there has been some debate over what meaning should be attached to them: the controversy concerns whether they should be considered evidence of ritualized prostitution or simply insults. For the former, see Brongersma (1990) 31–40, for the latter, Dover (1978) 128.

³ Snyder (2003); Sabatini, Raffaelli, and D’Achille (1987); Prichard (1967); Fleming (2001).

⁴ *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (2003).

on the architrave of a temple, or (to cite something more modern) the signs in a restaurant which designate one bathroom for women and one for men. Both of these texts too are profoundly material, and deeply embedded in their particular location, but they speak with a voice of authority which graffiti by definition lack. Thus, looking back to the poem from the Sutro Baths, it is worth noting that part of its wit lies in the title 'Public Service Announcement', which both indicates the ways in which the text would like to deconstruct the idea of 'public service', and ironically underscores the individual and private voice of the poem. By adopting and then subverting the language of public authority, the poem insists on its right to speak but also places itself in opposition to other 'announcements' found in public places.

Indeed, it is precisely this private voice which may be the unifying and distinguishing characteristic of graffiti; the extent to which they do not have, or even attempt to have, access to traditional kinds of authorizing power is the thing which differentiates graffiti from other texts written in public or private spaces. By 'authorizing power' I do not simply mean the kinds of authority which are explicitly or implicitly invoked in, for instance, dedicatory inscriptions, as when we learn from the front of the Pantheon that 'Agrippa, consul for the third time, made [the temple]'. Agrippa's authority to say that he built the building is obvious, even at the same time that the fact that he built the building is part of creating that authority. But more interesting, and insidious, is the kind of authority which stands behind (for example) the signs which distinguish two identical bathrooms from one another, calling one 'men' and the other 'women'. Unlike Agrippa's inscription, these texts come with no name attached, no identifiable individual whose power may be construed to enforce their meaning. Nevertheless, by a kind of collective community consent, such pronouncements are still given purchase on contemporary daily life.

Graffiti in the modern day must be seen in opposition to such publicly authored texts. What distinguishes graffiti is the insistent individuality of their voices; these are words, or pictures, produced by a single person on his or her private initiative, without the kind of authorization which either explicitly or implicitly lies behind other kinds of texts found written on walls. This is not to say that all graffiti

⁵ Fleming (2001) 29.

come with a name attached to them. Far from it: like the sign which tells you not to smoke on the bus, most graffiti are anonymous, or at the most name an author who cannot be identified (e.g. 'Killroy was here'). But the point that I would like to make is that the anonymity of the printed sign and that of the scratched graffiti are qualitatively different, in that the one trades on the idea of a vast and nameless communal interest or authority, while the other speaks individually, as a single and immediate voice which demands attention for its own particular subjectivity. It is perhaps because of this sense of particularity in graffiti that they are often seen in the modern day as transgressive, hostile to the viewer, or, as one scholar wrote of the New York subway paintings, 'a symbolically violent attack on an equally symbolic category of property'.⁶ Graffiti today offend because, in public space, they are understood as the triumph of one person's right to individual expression over another's, so that they are different from—to pursue the example of the New York subway system—the advertising posters which take up far more space in stations than the graffiti paintings ever did. But the difference, again, is in the construed authorship of the image: the posters may have been financed by whatever company whose product they advertise, but they are present in the station by some kind of supposed community consent; graffiti, on the other hand, seek no one's permission and are imagined to speak to no one's interests but the author's.

It is thus important to recognize that 'graffiti' as a category is unstable across time, since it is tied to issues which are grounded in particular social and historical contexts: ideas of authorship, concepts of public and private property, technologies of reading and writing. As these things change, so do graffiti, not just in how they look, but literally in what constitutes the category. When we turn our attention to the ancient world, then, it is necessary to be extremely careful both in using the term 'graffiti' and in which associations, based on our own modern experience, we bring to our study. This book, then, uses 'graffiti' as a way of identifying privately initiated, publicly readable texts found on the walls of the Roman city of Pompeii, destroyed by the eruption of the volcano Vesuvius in 79 CE. Because Pompeii and the surrounding areas were buried so suddenly and completely, much is preserved there which did not survive from elsewhere in the Roman

⁶ Cresswell (1992) 329–44, at 337.

Empire, or, indeed, anywhere else in the ancient world. This includes thousands of fragments of writing from both public and private spaces: advertisements, political solicitations, public notices, poems, personal notes, records of debts, and so on.⁷ Many of the more ‘formal’ of these texts, such as requests for votes for local candidates running for political office (*programmata*), are done in paint. But the most ‘private’ (love letters, jeers, salutations, and the like) are scratched into the soft plaster which covered most Roman walls, and are thus ‘graffiti’ proper. Although certain parts of Rome (the Palatine Hill, the cryptoporticus of the Horti Sallustiani, the portico of the Forum Iulium),⁸ Ostia, and other cities in Italy⁹ have also provided small collections of ancient wall texts, there is nothing to compare with the overall view of the urban environment provided by the city of Pompeii. Even given the fact that many of the texts surely disappeared in the eruption and subsequent centuries,¹⁰ and even setting aside those which survive but are incomprehensible to the modern eye, we are still left with thousands of fragments, a data set at once exciting and sobering as a source for studying the social life of the ancient city.

One of the things which distinguishes Pompeian graffiti writers, however, is how many of them show familiarity with authors whose works emerged from the highest of high ancient literary culture: Virgil, Ovid, Propertius, Ennius. This is a marked contrast between ancient and more modern wall-writing. As Christopher Wordsworth, who first ‘discovered’ Pompeii’s literary graffiti, remarked rather dryly in 1837, ‘I should much question whether all the walls of all the country towns in England, would, if Milton were lost, help us to a single line of the *Paradise Lost*’.¹¹ The diffusion of literary quotation in the Pompeian graffiti allows us to see how far ancient canonical texts penetrated beyond the social class of their authors and how they

⁷ Estimates vary, but as one scholar notes, *CIL* 4 contains almost 11,000 pieces of text which survive from the walls of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and that only includes material excavated before 1956: Mouritsen (1988) 9; cited in Franklin (1991) 77–98.

⁸ Brandt (2008); Solin et al. (1966); Della Corte (1933) 111–30. For a general overview, see Solin (1971) 201–8.

⁹ For a general overview, and citations to the publications of graffiti corpora, see Solin (2008) 99–124, at 104–5.

¹⁰ William Harris observes, ‘a much greater number of graffiti and dipinti were visible in Pompeii on 24 August 79 than have ever been read by archaeologists’: (1983) 87–111, at 103.

could be used and abused by those who ‘published’ on walls rather than papyrus. Moreover, although some of my study concerns graffiti quotations (manipulated and otherwise) from canonical authors, I also discuss more independent compositions, that is, poetry which only appears in our records as graffiti. These texts too, I argue, show a real awareness of both the formal and thematic traditions of canonical poetry, while at the same time preserving a strong sense of themselves as emerging from and contributing to a different discourse of written art. When I speak of ‘literary graffiti’, therefore, I mean those fragments whose form, diction, or sentiment point to the influence of canonical Latin literature, in addition to those texts containing direct literary quotations.

This study is an attempt to read these writings within their own material, textual, and social framework. Methodologically, it borrows strongly from art historians and archaeologists who have focused on recontextualizing Pompeian paintings and other objects, long isolated from their original material environments by antiquated excavation techniques and disparate scholarly approaches. These scholars have also underscored the importance of ‘popular’ visual art, and its relationship with more familiar elite cultural products, into which Pompeii gives us remarkable insight. Epigraphy, too, has turned in recent years to examining the social environments which gave rise to individual inscriptions and types of inscription (like funerary texts), a methodological movement of which this study seeks to be a part. The popular literary arts have also been explored by some scholars, although generally without considering the graffiti evidence;¹² those scholars who do turn their attention to wall writing usually do so without considering social-historical questions of class, literacy, or how the graffiti texts differ fundamentally from those which we read in books.¹³ Finally, as will be discussed, the materiality both of and within ancient literature has begun to be explored provocatively by critics who study canonical authors. Throughout this study I will be applying their insights—about the role of politics in poetry, the nature of ancient authorship, the relationship between reader and written text—to the graffiti evidence from Pompeii. Although there is a danger in using elite texts to read non-elite culture, I think that it is important

¹¹ Wordsworth (1837) 6.

¹² e.g. Purcell (1995) 3–37; Horsfall (2003).

¹³ e.g. Della Valle (1937) 139–75; Gigante (1979); Varone (2002).

to recognize the extent to which the graffiti texts are performative of their own popularism; that is, how they both are and wish to be understood as resistant readings of canonical texts. It is in this theft and redeployment of high literature, I think, that we may find an important alternative view of what cultural production meant in the early Roman Empire.

One further point. This study is intended to be thematic rather than comprehensive; I have not tried to include every scrap of ‘literature’—or possible literature—which appears on Pompeii’s walls. In general, I have focused on those fragments which are in some fashion metrical, in part because this gives them an easy-to-identify connection with texts which we know from more elite contexts. In addition, the fact of meter argues for greater deliberation or self-consciousness on the part of their writers than of those who wrote the numerous boasts, insults, announcements, critiques, threats, and other random utterances which decorated Pompeii’s walls. Llewelyn Morgan has recently noted that ‘the intrinsic artificial character of metrical language’, while also noting that there are certain genres (satire and iambus) which ‘flirt with the possibility that they have no formal organization and are not really metrical artefacts at all, and by the same token dissociate themselves from those characteristics—elevation, polish, artifice—that metrical form bestows upon language’.¹⁴ Among the Pompeian graffiti too we find ongoing tension or play between the ritualized or elevated tone created by meter and the informal or popular nature of the medium and its messages. By focusing primarily on metrical texts and fragments, this study seeks to isolate and investigate moments when that tension comes sharply into focus.

Although between the text and the footnotes, the reader will find references to most of those graffiti texts which have been recognized as poetic, again I would like to emphasize that my goal was not to list every instance of meter found on Pompeian walls. Compendia of this kind do exist, and vary greatly in quality, but those who seek a full list of scraps of Campanian graffiti poetry should consult the references to *CIL* 4 in Bücheler and Lommatzsch’s *Carmina Latina Epigraphica* (*CLE*), vol. 2. 1–3, M. Gigante’s *Civiltà delle forme letterarie nell’antica Pompei* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1979), and/or A. Varone’s *Erotica Pompeiana: Love Inscriptions on the Walls of Pompeii* (Rome:

¹⁴ Morgan (2010) 4–5; cf. Fussell (1979) 4–5, 12.

‘L’Erma’ di Bretschneider, 2002).¹⁵ E. Courtney’s *Musa Lapidaria* (Atlanta: American Philological Association, 1995) also lists many of the more famous examples and provides useful and often brilliant insights into the texts. A. and M. G. Cooley’s *Pompeii: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2005) also contains an appendix which lists all known quotations from known canonical authors on the walls of Pompeii, although this does not (of course) include ‘independent’ compositions, otherwise unknown works by canonical authors, or works by authors who were canonical in antiquity but whose names are now lost. It is also sometimes unclear whether a text is literary or not; Lommatsch, for instance, includes *cum quidam pauper* (‘when a certain poor man . . .’: *CLE* 1864 = *CIL* 4. 4114 et al.) in his list of senarii, but it will be seen that, depending on what follows, this could also be the beginning of a hexameter, a pentameter, or not poetic at all.¹⁶ In such cases, I have included those fragments which I found personally convincing and interesting from a literary perspective—an idiosyncratic approach, I admit, but the only one which made sense. I have also generally neglected Herculaneum, mostly because, as is noted later, to the extent that it even had a graffiti-writing culture, it appears to have been very different from that which prevailed in Pompeii. Although there are clearly commonalities between the two cities, this study is an attempt both to celebrate and more fully to understand Pompeii’s uniqueness, and for this reason it focuses specifically and occasionally minutely on the details of its particular ‘literary landscape’.

¹⁵ In addition, a good general introduction to the wall writings from the ancient Bay of Naples may be found in Wallace (2005).

¹⁶ Although the repetition on numerous different walls does suggest that it was part of the popular canon, like those fragments discussed at the end of Ch. 3. On the other hand, a possible parallel from Petronius’ *Satyricon* would seem to point us towards prose: when the rhetorician Agamemnon begins a story with ‘*Pauper et dives inimici erat*’ (‘A poor man and a rich man were enemies . . .’: *Sat.* 48). Trimalchio’s joking interruption (‘*Quid est pauper?*’: ‘What’s a poor man?’) suggests that there is something conventional about this opening.

MATERIAL MATTERS

One way in which Pompeii's graffiti differ from more traditional texts is that they 'speak' not just as literary fragments but also as part of a very particular material environment. Since graffiti, both literary and otherwise, are found throughout the city—in public spaces such as the Forum, the dining rooms of wealthy mansions, the vestibules of poor private homes—questions of place are critical for thinking about the texts' meaning. This aspect of ancient graffiti makes them simultaneously evocative and elusive. Scholars who have approached the graffiti from the literary side tend to see them as isolated texts and so do not consider the fact that two similar couplets have been found on opposite sides of the city, or the ways in which a poem might have been responding to its immediate material environment. On the other hand, archaeologists and historians, whose interests lie in the material aspects of ancient social life, often are not interested in considering issues like representation, literary artifice, and reader response. In this study, I contextualize the literary graffiti by asking both how the graffiti reflect contemporary modes of poetic expression (their use of the language, meter, and style found in canonical poetry) and how they are embedded in their particular physical environment; in short, I examine the poems as both textual and material artefacts, as the domain of both the literary critic and the archaeologist.

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in the material aspects of literature throughout history. Thus, for instance, J. Fleming's 2001 study looked specifically at graffiti in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century England and emphasized the ways in which inscriptions give us a window onto historical moments when the abstraction of the written word from the material world it describes was not as advanced as it is in the modern day. Much attention has also been focused on the history of the book and the effect that various technological advances (most notably, the printing press) had on authors, readers, and the function of the written word in society.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the state of our evidence for the classical

¹⁷ Darnton (1982) 65–83 traces the modern study of book history to France in the 1960s and publications such as Febvre and Martin (1976 [1st. pub. in French, 1958]). For a more recent overview and introduction, see Finkelstein and McCleery (2005). Materialism in literature has also attracted interest: e.g. Salemme (1976); Brown (2003); Hack (2005); Freedgood (2006); etc.

past—the fact that the vast majority of our texts survive as copies produced in later periods rather than in their original material form—means that there has been far less discussion of the materiality of classical literature. The work of Shane Butler, on Cicero and ‘the page’ as an ancient literary phenomenon,¹⁸ is a noteworthy exception, as are some recent discussions of Martial’s epigrams.¹⁹ Although these scholars must be commended for drawing attention to what was clearly an important practical and theoretical concern for ancient authors, they do not extend their studies beyond canonical literature, to texts whose content and material form are inextricable from one another. It is true that there has recently been increased interest in ancient graffiti in general, as may be seen (for instance) in the chapter on the graffiti of Smyrna in R. Bagnall’s *Everyday Writing in the Graeco-Roman East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011) and the volume *Ancient Graffiti in Context* (New York and London: Routledge, 2011) edited by J. A. Baird and C. Taylor.²⁰ Yet none of these scholars attempts to take the graffiti seriously as literature, or to understand them using the tools which literary critics have developed to interpret canonical texts. I hope, therefore, that this project will make a contribution not just to our understanding of ancient graffiti, but also to a more comprehensive sense of how early imperial authors saw that poetry had the potential to convey meaning both as representational vehicle and material form.

Indeed, Italy of the first century CE was a place and time that might well have inspired authors to investigate the material aspects of literature. On the one hand, the early Roman Empire saw the rise of the book roll as a primary medium of publication; poetry was no longer tied to a performance context as it had been in (for instance) archaic Greece and could travel on papyrus far from the person of its author. This is not to say that earlier authors had not communicated through writing, but we find in late republican and early imperial poetry a new interest in, and self-consciousness about, the ways in

¹⁸ Butler (2002), (2011).

¹⁹ e.g. D. P. Fowler (1995) 31–58; Roman (2001) 113–45.

²⁰ Cf. Benefiel (2008) 193–200; (2010) 59–101. Benefiel has been one of the pioneers of looking at graffiti in context, using archaeological evidence to understand the texts’ relationship to one another as well as their material environment. Another important contribution to this will be the volume on the graffiti from the Insula of the Menander by Mouritsen, Varone, Ling, and Ling (forthcoming).

which poetry was not just an experience but an object.²¹ This was especially true of Roman elegy, the genre which was perhaps the most influential for the writers of the Pompeian graffiti.²² At the same time, Italian imperial culture of the first century CE was fully immersed in what classical scholars have come to call the ‘epigraphic habit’, the characteristically Roman practice of recording acts and events on stone. Both public and private individuals who had even marginal means to hire a stonemason left behind inscriptions—honorific, commemorative, funerary—documenting multiple aspects of social life, from birth to death. In addition, the fact that funerary epitaphs were not infrequently composed as poems means that they too, like the rise of the book roll, contributed to a general sense that poems could be understood as much as material objects as literary texts.

Indeed, there are significant similarities between Pompeian graffiti and Roman funerary epitaphs, and not just in that they both represent a material and sometimes poetic text. Unlike state records of decrees or dedications, both funerary inscriptions and wall writings employ a distinctly ‘private’ authorial persona—that is, both claim the attention of the reader not on the strength of public authority but on behalf of an individual and subjective voice. I have, however, chosen to focus my study on the graffiti, both because they have been considerably less studied than funerary inscriptions and because there is an important and additional aspect to their meaning: local historical specificity. By this I do not just mean that we are able to pinpoint a chronological moment for the Pompeian material with far greater precision than for most ancient epitaphs—the destruction of the city in 79 CE providing a definitive *terminus ante quem* for the wall writings²³—but also something deeper and more abstract. Whereas the creation of a funerary monument was a formal, stable, and culturally approved act, the creation of a graffito was clearly much more casual and much less controlled. This is not to say that we should assume ancient graffiti carried the same sense of

²¹ Roman (2006) 351–88.

²² Clay (1998) 9–40; Farrell (1999) 127–41; Connolly (2000) 71–98.

²³ I set aside here the oddly persistent, but to my mind nonsensical, idea that Pompeii’s graffiti were written by former residents or looters who tunneled into the buried city after its destruction. Whether anyone returned to the city at all is the matter of some debate (see Descoeudres (1993) 165–78); that they did so and spent their time underground, in the dark, scratching text onto plaster walls—which, they must have imagined, no one would see again—seems to me highly unlikely.

criminality and transgression than their counterparts do in the modern world, since the volume and placement of the texts in Pompeii indicate at the very least a much wider wall-writing culture than we have today. It is rather to insist on the ways in which the impermanence and subjective informality of the ancient wall texts mean that they continuously invite us not just to consider the message they communicate, but to imagine the moment at which the communication was made. Fundamentally, graffiti are significant not just as artefacts *qua* artefacts, or even as texts *qua* texts, but as traces of the act of inscribing them. 'Graffiti', critic Susan Stewart observes of the modern day, 'is not a crime of content'.²⁴ Unlike funerary epitaphs, the graffiti demand that we ask: who stood here and wrote this? Under what conditions? For what purpose?

When I speak of the literary graffiti's 'contexts', then, I do not just mean the physical situations of individual fragments of script, but also the environmental and historical circumstances which surrounded the individuals who wrote them and therefore gave meaning to the act of writing. Of course, there is an inescapable paradox here, which is that our only access to individual graffiti writers is through the medium of the texts they left behind. And although different styles of handwriting may be identified in a single grouping of texts, there is not sufficient variation among the hands to track a single writer across Pompeii. I am not, therefore, interested in constructing imaginary biographies for the Pompeians who wrote graffiti—biographies which, as much late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship on the Pompeian wall texts shows, tend to reveal more about the historical circumstances of the scholar than about the author of any given graffito. Rather, this study seeks to explore and exploit the biographies of the texts themselves, the local histories of individual fragments and collections of fragments which may then give us insight into the network of cultural practices from which they arose.

Unfortunately, Pompeii generally, and its graffiti in particular, present the scholar with some significant challenges. The site itself has a very long excavation history, dating back to the middle of the eighteenth century, which means that the earliest archaeological

²⁴ S. Stewart (1991) 226.

accounts are themselves historical documents.²⁵ Initially, Pompeii and its sister-city Herculaneum were seen simply as the source of ancient paintings and sculptures, which were pulled from the ground with no thought of recording their material context. Systematic 'scientific' archaeology does not arrive on the scene until the second half of the nineteenth century, and even then there was clearly more interest in excavating the wealthier, more lavishly decorated parts of the city. The publication of excavation reports is uneven over time: excellent from about 1860 to 1920; almost non-existent in the 1930s and 1940s; minimal from the 1950s to 1970s. Mussolini's government's interest in the classical past greased the wheels for more systematic digging at both Herculaneum and Pompeii, but the bombing of the latter in August and September of 1943 by Allied planes did considerable damage. A serious earthquake in 1980, a reminder that the volcano is still very much active, also took a heavy toll on the remains, and the collapse of walls and even entire buildings (such as the House of the Gladiators) in recent years illustrates how fragile the site has become. Presently, about a third of Pompeii is unexcavated, and much recent work has focused on re-excavating and maintaining long-exposed areas of the city rather than opening up new ones.

Independently, Pompeii's wall writings make for a frustrating topic of study.²⁶ As will be noted, some of the longer texts which were excavated in the nineteenth century were treated like paintings and carefully removed from the city's walls; the plaster fragments which preserve them can be found today in the storerooms of the Naples Archaeological Museum.²⁷ Others excavated more recently were taken to the *deposito* at the site itself. Still others were left *in situ*, which generally means that they fell victim to the elements and are

²⁵ For an excellent overview of the archaeological history of the site, see Foss (2007) 28–42. Cf. Laidlaw (2007) 620–36. This volume as a whole represents a fine introduction to Pompeii for both scholar and layperson.

²⁶ For an overview, see Franklin (2007) 518–25. Franklin does not give much attention to graffiti proper, focusing his attention instead on the programmata or political advertisements. A more thorough history of graffiti studies in the Bay of Naples can be found in Gigante (1979) 18–31.

²⁷ Although it is worth noting that the cataloguing of these fragments by the Museum leaves something to be desired: some of the earliest pieces to be placed there were not given accession numbers and therefore no information on them can be found in the Museum's records. This is true of (e.g.) *CIL* 4. 5296, discussed in Ch. 4 and widely believed by the scholarly community to have been lost.

now lost. It is true that the magisterial fourth volume of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* contains records of most of the texts excavated before 1956, and is associated with some of the greatest names in Pompeian archaeology and epigraphy: Theodor Mommsen, Antonio Sogliano, Augustus Mau, Matteo Della Corte. On the other hand, its method of presentation—discrete entries for what the editor considered each individual text, sometimes with a line drawing of the original, sometimes with commentary—can be very misleading, as it obscures what spatial relationship texts had to one another. Moreover, single inscriptions are occasionally and inappropriately divided in two, or two are conflated with one another. The syntax, spelling, and orthography of the texts vary widely, from very ‘literate’ to very rudimentary; there are certain standard errors,²⁸ but others appear to be idiosyncratic to the individual writer. We do not know who wrote the graffiti texts, as the vast majority are anonymous, and those which do preserve a name offer little context for interpreting it: are the names authentic, or are they pseudonyms? Nicknames? Is the person whose name appears actually the writer, or simply the ‘written-about’? Especially in the absence of a better historic understanding of ancient wall-writing habits (on which, see the section ‘Speaking and writing’), our ability to read the social identities of the Pompeian graffiti writers will continue to be limited.

In addition, as has already been noted, the wall writings are also material objects: where they were found is often as much a part of their meaning as what they say. Yet to identify an individual inscription with its original material context is, at best, laborious and, at worst, impossible. *CIL*, the most accessible source for the inscriptions, uses several different systems of identifying addresses in Pompeii. The first volume was published before an overall grid was established for the city, so the locations given are mostly descriptive (‘near the doorway two doors south of the intersection with the Via di Nola’) and houses are identified by name (‘the House of the Faun’). The first publication of the volume provided a map to which the descriptions were keyed, but subsequent printings have unfortunately omitted it, as well as the indices and the line drawings of the texts originally included. Later parts of *CIL* 4 employ the method developed by Giuseppe Fiorelli in the late 1860s, which gives addresses by

²⁸ Väänänen (1937); cf. Franklin (2007) 519.

numbered region, *insula* (or city block), and doorway (see Figure 0.1 for a map showing Pompeii's *regiones* and *insulae*). This is the manner by which locations in Pompeii are still given, but many *insulae* in Regiones 1 and 2 were renumbered in 1957, so that the addresses from those regions given in the final parts of *CIL* 4 are incorrect based on today's numbering system.²⁹ These later volumes (vol. 4, parts 3–4) also lack indices. The best means of locating an individual inscription is to refer to the original excavation reports, which are only available in specialized libraries and simply include inscriptions along with reports of the other material remains. Moreover, as happens not infrequently in Pompeian studies,³⁰ errors have crept into the scholarly record which persist as one generation of scholars repeats incorrect information provided by the last. Add these difficulties to the sheer volume of material and it is not surprising that few books have attempted to take the Pompeian graffiti seriously as archaeological objects, and to see them in their original context as part of the urban landscape.

Pompeii is often celebrated as offering a 'snapshot' of antiquity, a city frozen in time by the eruption in 79 CE. Up until very recently, this meant that it was only the final phase of the city's development which excited scholarly interest; only over the past few years have archaeologists begun investigating how the community developed into what it was at the final moment of destruction.³¹ One of the events whose impact, it seems to me, we still do not completely understand, was the devastating earthquake which rocked Pompeii in 62 CE, seventeen years before Vesuvius would administer the final *coup de grâce*.³² It has been suggested that as much as a third of the city was rendered uninhabitable by the 62 disaster. Certainly, there were significant effects on the urban environment which are evident in its final phase, perhaps most notably the extent to which large domestic spaces had been subdivided into smaller dwellings or transformed into industrial workshops.³³ Exactly what effect the earthquake had on the graffiti evidence, however, is more difficult to divine. It is challenging to date Pompeian wall writings, as most do

²⁹ A complete list of the different numbering systems (including Della Corte's) and their modern equivalents can be found in Eschebach (1993) 6.

³⁰ Laidlaw (2007) 620.

³¹ Carafa (2007) 63–72; Geertman (2007) 82–97.

³² Adam (1986) 67–89; cf. Dobbins (1994) 629–94.

³³ Andreau (1973) 369–95.

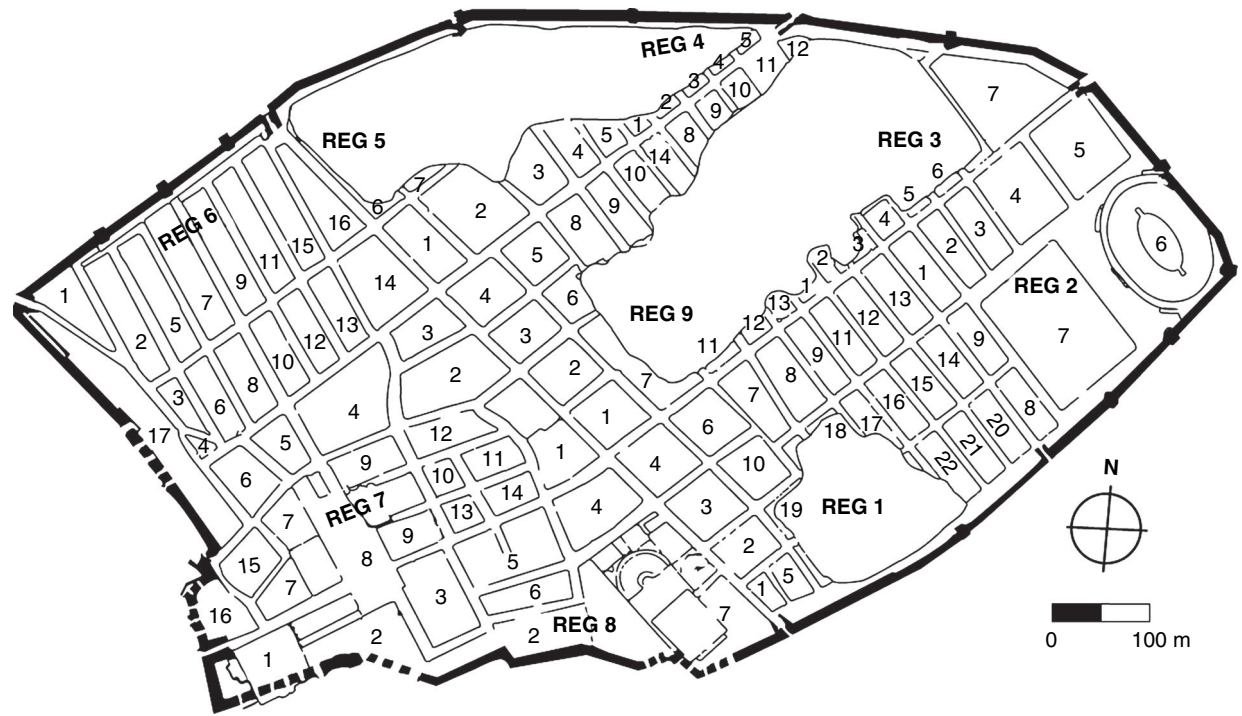


Figure 0.1. Map of Pompeii, showing numbers of *regiones* and *insulae*, after R. Lawrence, *Roman Pompeii: Space and Society* (London and New York, 1994) 2. Redrawn by Sam Woolley.

not offer chronological information, and those which do overwhelmingly provide a day but not a year.³⁴ Those which do record the Roman consuls—our best means for establishing a firm date—range remarkably widely, from the earliest of 78 BCE (*CIL* 4. 1842, from the basilica) to the latest of 60 CE (*CIL* 4. 4182, in the House of the Silver Wedding). It is perhaps not surprising that there are more dates in the Common Era than before it—one would expect that graffiti would generally not be preserved for more than a century—but a closer examination reveals a couple of curious circumstances: first, that six (perhaps seven) of the fifteen dates come from the reign of Tiberius, whose twenty-two years on the throne represent only about 16 per cent of the 138-year span covered by the dated graffiti. This may in great part be explained by the cluster of dated inscriptions from the Via della Fortuna (*CIL* 4. 1552–6), which give the years 17, 19, 21, and 29 CE—although, in addition, *CIL* 4. 5214 (from the House of the Centenary) gives 15 CE and 4. 5432 (from the villa of Publius Fannius Synistor in Boscoreale) must date after 12 CE. The case of *CIL* 4. 1885, however, is cautionary: it records the consuls of 18 CE, but in such a fashion that it is clear that its writer has simply copied words from a formal inscription in stone nearby (see Chapter 3). Thus, as always, we need to be wary of assuming that the information contained in a graffito is historically transparent.

The other curious fact about the dated graffiti is that none of them give years after the earthquake of 62. In certain senses, this is peculiar, as one would expect the damage to the city would have entailed a fair amount of replastering, so that older graffiti would have been destroyed and replaced by new ones. It is, of course, possible that this happened, and the new (dated) graffiti are simply the extremely numerous ones which provide information about the day but not the year of inscription. If so, however, we are left with the question of why the writers of the few older dated texts would give the consular year and those of the newer ones would content themselves with marking the day alone. I cannot provide a definitive answer to this question, although it is worth noting that those recording days but not years seem more ephemeral and mundane, relating to the

³⁴ The dated inscriptions are: *CIL* 4. 1842 (78 BCE); 1847 (48 BCE?); 2437 (37 BCE); 2450 (3 BCE); 10018 (6 CE); 5432 (after 12 CE); 5214 (15 CE); 1552 (17 CE); 1885 (18 CE); 1556 (19 CE); 1553–4 (21 CE); 1555 (29 CE); 8989 (57 CE); 1544 (59 CE); 4182 (60 CE). *CIL* 4. 4748 gives a partial date, but the consuls are unknown.

payment of debts, the purchase of goods, and so on. Thus, *CIL* 4. 4528 and 8203–4 record the activities of the moneylender and pawnbroker Faustilla, but offer only the information that the money changed hands on (respectively) the Nones of February, four days before the Nones and the Ides of July.³⁵ The ‘occasional’ nature of these texts might thus both explain their greater numbers and suggest that they would not be preserved long. In sum, we may say that we have significant evidence that, as a corpus, the Pompeian graffiti probably span a number of decades. Although the 62 earthquake may have resulted in a certain amount of renovation which would have destroyed the earlier texts on the walls, there are enough inscriptions, from a variety of locations, dated before that time to indicate that graffiti survived time and natural disasters surprisingly well.

There is another date which ‘frames’ the years covered by the dated inscriptions: 80 BCE, which is when Latin became the official language of Pompeii. In the aftermath of the Social Wars, in which Pompeii fought against Rome and was besieged by L. Cornelius Sulla, the city was colonized by Roman veterans and renamed *Colonia Cornelia Veneria Pompeianorum*. Before this, it seems that one of the main languages spoken in the streets was Oscan, a native Italian tongue which used a different alphabet from Latin and was written right to left. A number of formal inscriptions in Oscan survive from Pompeii, perhaps most notably the so-called ‘eituns’ texts, painted on street corners to direct soldiers to the city walls during the siege by Sulla.³⁶ There are also Oscan electoral notices, some of which seem to refer to Roman magistracies, suggesting that the local language continued to be spoken even after the official language was changed.³⁷ Moreover, J. N. Adams points to an Oscan inscription from the second century BCE which appears to have been recopied after being damaged in the earthquake; he suggests that the native language of the area may have been enjoying an antiquarian resurgence after being suppressed under Roman rule.³⁸ Yet there are almost no surviving scratched graffiti in Oscan: only a handful of partial alphabets (*CIL* 4. p. 164) and a few individual words and names (*CIL* 4. 674; 1608; 2200; 2395;

³⁵ Other graffiti which provide a day but not a year include: *CIL* 4. 8491; 8728–9; 8805; 8820–63; 8972; 9108–9; 9997; 10012; 10067; etc.

³⁶ Laing (1920/1) 451–63, at 455.

³⁷ Adams (2003b) 146.

³⁸ Adams (2003b) 147.

3223; and 4433).³⁹ The vast majority of Pompeian wall inscriptions, including that dated to 78 BCE, are in Latin, although there are quite a number of Greek or Greek-influenced texts.⁴⁰ The latter category includes both Greek transliterated into Latin characters and Latin transliterated into Greek. This mixture of languages certainly suggests a fairly wide bilingualism in the Pompeian population—although, as will be discussed, it must be remembered that graffiti are written texts and thus tell us more about bilingual literacy than about bilingual speech.⁴¹ But, in terms of dating, the extant graffiti seem to reflect the language habits of post-colonization Pompeii.⁴²

In the absence of better techniques for dating graffiti—which perhaps may come through chemical analysis of layers of wall plaster—we can only speculate about the actual chronological sweep of the graffiti evidence from Pompeii. But it is important to remember that, as Paul Zanker has put it, ‘at the time of its destruction in AD 79 Pompeii was already an old city and had been inhabited by many generations of people from different origins, each with its own uniquely structured society. If, as is usually the case, we look only at the townscape as it happened to be preserved in AD 79, then what meets the eye is just the last of a series of successive townscapes.’⁴³ If, as I have suggested, we should see the corpus of Pompeian graffiti as the product of accumulation over perhaps as much as the one hundred years preceding the eruption in 79 CE, it forces us to see Pompeii in more diachronic terms. It is thus appropriate to speak of it as reflecting not simply a literary scene specific to the late first century CE, but one which ranges over the end of the Roman Republic and the beginnings of imperial rule. Indeed, the fact that no inscriptions are dated after the earthquake in 62 CE may suggest that the catastrophic damage to the city deadened the cultural vibrancy which gave rise to the volume of earlier texts. One thing which is certainly also worth

³⁹ For an overview of Oscan inscriptions at Pompeii, see Antonini (1977) 317–40.

⁴⁰ See the very useful entry under *Graecanica* in the Index of Grammatica at the end of *CIL* 4, pt. 2 (p. 781). Note, however, that this does not include entries from the later parts (3 and 4) of *CIL* 4, which are unindexed.

⁴¹ For a very useful discussion of Greek–Latin transliteration in ancient texts, see Adams (2003) 41–67. He also makes the important point that Greek–Latin bilingualism was by no means restricted to the elite classes in Roman society (9–18).

⁴² There are a handful of graffiti in other languages at Pompeii, although their meaning and significance are disputed: for Aramaic, see Giordano and Kahn (2001) 83–8 and Lacerenza (1996) 166–88; for Safaitic, Calzini Gysens (1990) 1–7.

⁴³ Zanker (1998) 3.

noting is that, in comparison to its sister-city Herculaneum, Pompeii's walls preserve a far greater number and variety of texts. Herculaneum's almost complete lack of programmata has been linked to its different political climate,⁴⁴ but its lack of scratched graffiti—with a few noteworthy exceptions, mostly from the Suburban Baths—is more difficult to explain. It has been noted that Herculaneum's commercial activities seem to have been focused far more on the local market than on the wider region, or indeed the wider Roman world, as at Pompeii, and that there is far less evidence of 'low life' (in the form of brothels, taverns, and notices of gladiatorial games) to be found in the former's streets.⁴⁵ Thus it may well be that Herculaneum was simply a 'quieter' city, without the differences in class and culture which gave liveliness to the community of Pompeii.

SPEAKING AND WRITING

At the same time, we are still a long way from understanding Roman habits of wall writing. Part of the difficulty arises from the fact that our literary sources, on whom we often rely to explain ancient social customs, are largely silent on the subject of graffiti—or rather, we might say, they are largely silent on what distinguishes wall writing from other ancient literate practices. It is worth noting that there seems to have been no word in either ancient Greek or Latin which we can reliably translate as 'graffiti'. Other than the rather vexed term *sopio*, *-onis*—which appears in Catullus 37 and perhaps in Petronius (22) but whose meaning is disputed⁴⁶—the vocabulary for writing on walls in antiquity is not appreciably different from the vocabulary for writing in other contexts. This does not mean, however, that we can entirely agree with the critic who asserts 'there is no sign that anyone, until the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century, thought

⁴⁴ Wallace-Hadrill (2011) 290–2.

⁴⁵ Wallace-Hadrill (2011) 294–300.

⁴⁶ In Petronius, the use of the word is a restoration, as the manuscripts seem to have something like *sopitionibus*. More to the point, however, is the fact that *sopio* may have nothing to do with writing per se, but rather be another one of the numerous Latin euphemisms for penis (which is how the *OLD* has it). On the controversy, see Adams (1982) 64–5.

[writing on monuments] was a separate, special category of activity worthy of any notice'.⁴⁷ While it is true that both the term 'graffiti' and our modern idea of what it means seem both to have their origins in late Romanticism and the early Victorian period (on which more later),⁴⁸ I would argue that the inscription in public places of ostensibly private texts actually occupies an important place in both ancient literature and culture. But because ancient understandings of, among other things, the 'privacy' of authorship and the meaning of 'public' space were different from our own, the Romans and classical Greeks had no need of a single word for the—to the modern mind—incongruous combination of the two.

Looking at ancient *testimonia* about wall writing, both similarities to and differences from modern 'graffiti' are evident. The earliest mention of the practice occurs in Aristophanes, where it appears in the context of pederastic courtship: at *Wasps* 98–9, Xanthias notes that jury-mad Philocleon is accustomed to write 'the ballot box is beautiful' (κημὸς καλός) on doorways underneath more conventional statements in praise of a local beautiful boy; the scholiast on the passage confirms that the formula 'ὁ δεῖνα καλός' was a canonical one for erotic writings on trees and walls (*Schol. in Vesp.* 99d). A similar joke on erotic graffiti practices appears in *Acharnians*, where the pro-Athens Sitalces is described as writing 'Ἀθηναῖοι καλοί' ('Athenians are lovely!') all over public walls (*Ach.* 143–4). During a later period, Greek graffiti also appears in erotic contexts to have been written by and for women as well. In the famous story about the violation of the statue of Cnidian Aphrodite preserved in Pseudo-Lucian's *Erotes*, the besotted young man supposedly covered walls and trees alike with praises of the goddess (16). One of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* depicts the trouble stirred up by some malicious graffiti: Melitta's lover Charinus leaves her because he has seen 'Melitta loves Hermotimus' and 'Hermotimus the shipmaster loves Melitta' written on a wall near the Dipylon Gate (*Dial. Meretr.* 5. 3). Such representations indicate how the public and anonymous nature of graffiti also lent itself to character assassination, a practice

⁴⁷ Varnedoe and Gopnik (1990) 69–99, at 69.

⁴⁸ The popularization of 'graffiti' as a term for written as well as pictorial wall-inscriptions can probably be attributed to the work of R. Garrucci (1856). This book was widely circulated and became well known; it was the first to include extensive line drawings of the Pompeian wall texts and thus to bring them directly to the attention of scholars.

to which Lucian also attests. In *Dial. Meretr.* 10. 5, Chelidonium is concerned that her lover's teacher wants to keep him for himself, so she plans to write 'Aristaenetus is corrupting Clinias' in the Cerimicus where she is sure the boy's father will see it.

Graffiti like these seem almost eerily modern; the formula 'so-and-so loves so-and-so' appears on many walls in the present day, and character assassination by means of graffiti is also not unknown. At the same time, however, the fact that ancient societies were not 'literate' in the same sense as modern ones means that any act of writing necessarily signified differently then and now. One place in which this becomes visible is the way that erotic inscription, described as a real social practice in the sources listed earlier, is incorporated into Greek and Latin literary texts. Thus, for instance, both the scholiast on Aristophanes' *Wasps* and Pseudo-Lucian make an association between writing on walls and on trees, a linkage which might seem curious to a reader of modern graffiti, which is closely associated with urbanism and thus would seem out of place in a wooded context. What is likely reflected in these ancient sources, though, is the programmatic appearance of graffiti in bucolic poetry, where writing amorous sentiments on trees is a commonplace; the motif may originate with Callimachus (*Aet. fr.* 73),⁴⁹ but spreads from there to Virgil's *Eclogues* (5. 13–15 and 10. 53–4), Ovid's *Heroides* (5. 21–2), Propertius (1. 18. 22), Glaucus of Nicopolis (*Palatine Anthology* 9. 341), and so on. Indeed, when Pliny offers a description of the shrine of Clitumnus at Hispellum, one way in which he evokes the romantic and pastoral nature of the place is by referring to *multa multorum omnibus columnis omnibus parietibus inscripta, quibus fons ille deus-que celebratur* ('very many things written on every column and wall, by which the spring and the god are honoured': Pliny, *Ep.* 8. 8. 7). Far from being seen as synonymous with urban blight, as it often is in the modern world, a certain type of 'unauthorized' writing was considered an integral part of the classical pastoral landscape.

Part of the reason for this incorporation of inscription into the world of bucolic poetry, it has been argued, is the way that such informal texts work to negotiate the boundary between the spoken and the written—an important relationship in a genre which simultaneously represents itself as immediate and performative, and as

⁴⁹ Cf. Theocritus, *Idyll* 18. 47–8, which records an epigram written on a tree in Sparta marking it as sacred to Helen.

deeply embedded in a textual tradition. Brian Breed has argued that writing on trees in Virgil's *Eclogues*, particularly, allows the poems to signify their ambition to reach both backwards and forwards in time, creating a 'permanence' for themselves which the 'ephemeral' venue of speech would not allow.⁵⁰ Thus, for instance, Mopsus in *Eclogue* 5 announces that, as his submission to the singing contest with Menalcas, he will perform a song about Daphnis 'which recently I inscribed on the green bark of a beech tree' (*in viridi nuper quae cortice fagi | carmina descripsi: Ec. 5. 13–14*). In this way, he suggests that his song has had a prior existence, and will have a future one, to the oral performance represented in the poem. Moreover, he—or, rather, Virgil—creates a link with Theocritus 1 and 7, earlier (textual) representations of Daphnis songs.⁵¹ Breed also argues that moments such as that in *Eclogue* 10, where Gallus imagines inscribing his *amores* on trees (*Ec. 10. 52–4*), 'authenticate' the *Eclogues* themselves as written texts: '[the tree] stands in for the page on which Virgil's poem is written . . . Readers need not feel that their particular experience of *Eclogue* 10 and of pastoral is somehow less than complete and authentic for being mediated through writing.'⁵²

Clearly there are significant differences between this type of programmatic and generically significant 'graffiti' in bucolic poetry and the 'real-life' wall texts which will be considered in this book. At the same time, however, it is useful to consider the way that informal inscriptions can be understood to walk the line between speech and writing—two modes of communication which are often viewed in the context of social history and anthropology as opposed to or in conflict with one another. A great deal of critical attention has been paid to the relationship between orality and literacy in the ancient world, and the volume of graffiti evidence from the Bay of Naples has been used to support the idea that early imperial Campania possessed a surprising large number of literate adults.⁵³ At the same time, however, Pompeian graffiti have also often been seen as having a privileged relationship to the world of everyday speech, in both practical terms—as a source for linguistic studies of spoken Latin⁵⁴—and

⁵⁰ Breed (2006) 72.

⁵¹ Breed (2006) 57–61.

⁵² Breed (2006) 132–3.

⁵³ Guillemin (1937) 78; Tanzer (1939) 83. This position is critiqued by Harris (1983) 102–11.

⁵⁴ An approach most famously represented in Väänänen (1937), but cf. Wachter (1998) 73–89.

more romantic ones—as evidence of how ‘real’ Romans ‘really’ interacted.⁵⁵ Instead of assigning the graffiti to one side or the other of the orality/literacy divide, I would argue that they should perhaps cause us to see how limited we are in our understanding of the relationship between the worlds of spoken and written words. As will be seen in the chapters which follow, many Pompeian graffiti texts show the influence of both textual and oral culture. From the witty epigram which ‘captures’ the reader’s voice for itself (*CIL* 4. 2360, discussed in Chapter 1), to the political slogans which seek to replicate the rhythms of everyday speech (Chapter 2), to the preponderance of lines and phrases taken from speeches in the quotations from Virgil’s *Aeneid* found on Pompeian walls (Chapter 5)—all suggest that to see graffiti as simply a form of writing is to miss their engagement with the more immediate and direct world of spoken communication. In the same way that the inscriptions on trees which characterize the pastoral landscape translate voice to text and vice versa, so too do the wall texts of Pompeii serve as a bridge between the oral and the literate.

In addition, recent scholarly work on the ancient world has emphasized the need to investigate not one level of ‘literacy’, but a multitude of ‘literacies’.⁵⁶ This first and foremost refers to the fact that in all societies, even in the modern West, many different levels of reading and writing ability exist side by side: some people may be able to read simple signs or a newspaper article, but could not make their way through a novel; others might be able to sign their names but could not write a complete letter. Moreover, as has been noted, reading and writing are separate skills and have not, historically, always gone hand in hand, so that proof of ability in one does not necessarily show mastery of the other.⁵⁷ Add to this the fact that we have no way of knowing who wrote graffiti on the walls of Pompeii, or whom those writers expected to read their writings, and it is clear that

⁵⁵ Thus, Amadeo Maiuri writes that the graffiti are an ‘echo of that lively, noisy, uproarious life in the open air which turned human relationships in a Campanian city, as it still does in the old quarters of Naples, into the life of a single immense household, where all feel themselves to be housemates and acquaintances, conversing and debating loudly as if within the walls of their own houses’: Maiuri (1978) 136 (quoted in Varone (2002) 103).

⁵⁶ As is represented in, for instance, the essays in Johnson and Parker (2009), especially those of R. Thomas (2009) 13–45 and Woolf (2009) 46–68.

⁵⁷ Emphasized and explored in Macdonald (2005) 45–114, esp. 50–68.

using the wall texts to assess numbers of literate urban inhabitants is a difficult proposition.⁵⁸ The same scholars who have emphasized the need to focus on the multitude of literacies in ancient societies have also noted that reading and writing are not simply useful skills but social acts: as Rosalind Thomas puts it, ‘what we should be turning our attention to is not calculating literacy rates, but examining what literacy is used for’;⁵⁹ or to quote William A. Johnson, it is necessary to consider ‘literacy not in the sense of whether 10 per cent or 30 per cent of people in the ancient world could read or write, but in the sense of text-oriented events embedded in particular sociocultural contexts’.⁶⁰ For the purposes of this study, I have put aside statistical or quantitative analyses of the Pompeian evidence, choosing instead to look at what the texts can tell us about the place of graffiti in the social and physical landscape of the ancient city. While it is clear that not everyone would have been able to read, let alone write on, public walls, nevertheless the texts were a fact of life for all inhabitants and visitors—a part of the urban environment which framed the experience (in different ways) of both readers and non-readers, writers and non-writers, alike.

One of the noteworthy qualities of the graffiti inscriptions from Pompeii and Herculaneum is that they display what we might term ‘recreational literacy’—that is, they use writing as a form of play. This is expressed in many different ways: from the famous *sator arepo tenet opera rotas* word square,⁶¹ to the palindrome (written in both Greek and transliterated Latin characters) *Ἡδῆ μοι Διὸς ἄρα πηγῆ παρὰ σοὶ Διομήδῃ*,⁶² to the morphological game *barbara barbaribus barbarant barbara barbis* (CIL 4. 4235), to the parody of the first line of the *Aeneid*, *fullones ululamque cano, non arma virumque* (CIL 4. 9131; see Chapter 5 for a fuller discussion). Indeed, even the numerous repetitions of the Greek and Latin alphabet (both forwards and backwards) can be seen not just as a rote exercise, but as individuals’

⁵⁸ Harris (1989): ‘defining the social range of graffiti writers has so far proved to be a practical impossibility’ (231). He adds that ‘[the graffiti] may for the most part have been written, over several years, indeed decades, by a few hundred literate slaves and by schoolboys from highly respectable families . . . Less is to be learned from [the graffiti] about the volume of literacy than has sometimes been realized’ (260–1).

⁵⁹ R. Thomas (1992a) 12.

⁶⁰ W. A. Johnson (2009) 3–10, at 3.

⁶¹ CIL 4. 8123, 8623.

⁶² CIL 4. 2400a, b w/p. 465. The line is also found in the *Anth. Plan.* 6. 13.

experiments with systematizing the building blocks of language.⁶³ The humour in the graffiti texts has often been seen simply as scatological, which it not infrequently is. But a focus on the obscene jokes should not blind us to other, more linguistic playfulness, like the neologisms *irrumabiliter* (CIL 4. 1931), *ceventinabiliter*, and *arrurabiliter* (4. 4126). Nor should we ignore more literary games, such as the poem—edited and praised by no less than A. E. Housman—found on the Via dell’Abbondanza and made up entirely of pentameters (4. 9123, discussed in Chapter 1). In another vein, there is playfulness evident in the porous boundary between visual and verbal art which is frequently exploited by writers, as the tail ends of letters are made into the oars of boats (4. 4225), a laurel wreath is added above the city’s title (4. 8596), or the first ‘s’ in *sum max(imus)* becomes the nose of a caricature (4. 9008).⁶⁴ More elaborate is the epigram found near the Porta di Nola, [*Se*]rpentis lusus si qui sibi forte notavit, | *Sepumius iuuenis quos fact ingenio*, | *spectator scaenae sive es studiosus equorum*, | *sic habeas lances se[m]per ubique pares* (‘If someone by chance should note the games of the snake, | which the young man Sepumius cleverly made, | whether you are in the audience of the theatre or mad about horses, | may you always and everywhere have fair fortune’: CIL 4. 1595). See Figure 0.2 for a line drawing. The poem is inscribed in the form of a snake, clearly a play on ‘the games of the snake’ mentioned in the poem, which itself plays with the repetition of the letter ‘s’—the first letter of the author’s name, the first letter in each line, and the letter imitated by the image of the snake’s body on the wall.

This last poem has been compared to the famous technopaignia of the Hellenistic poets,⁶⁵ wherein the form of the poem represents its subject. This kind of text has been well described by T. Habinek as drawing attention to the ‘arbitrariness of writing practices and . . . embodied aspects of writing, reading, and playing’⁶⁶—that is, the reader is forced to confront the materiality of the written word and

⁶³ ‘Surviving abecedaria are not simply exercises in the art of writing: they are the symbol of writing, a potent sign not just of alphabetization, but of system, regularity and pattern’: Purcell (1995) 32.

⁶⁴ For an exhaustive catalogue of the forms of pictorial graffiti, in Pompeii and elsewhere in the Roman Empire, see Langner (2001). He emphasizes the playfulness evident in the pictorial graffiti and the ways in which it led to the creation of new artistic forms: 79–83, 140.

⁶⁵ Gigante (1979) 230 n. 55.

⁶⁶ Habinek (2009) 114–42, at 127.

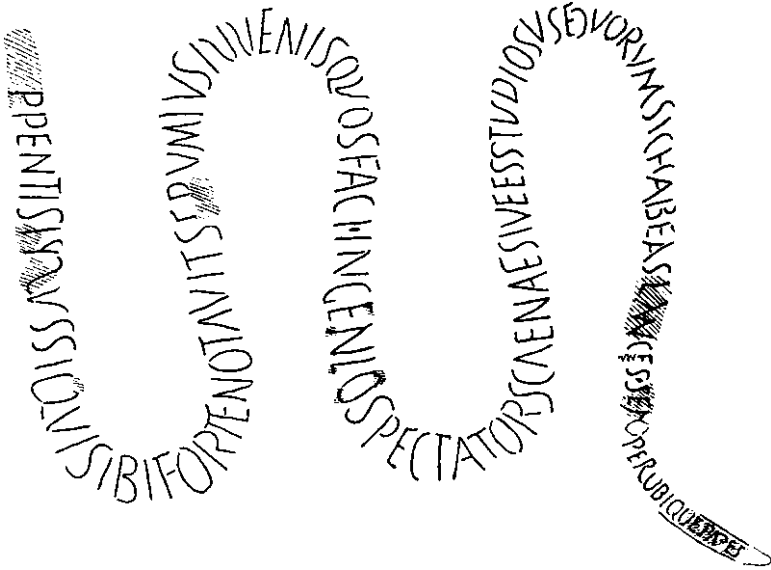


Figure 0.2. Line drawing of *CIL* 4. 1595, from *CIL* vol. 4.

to experience the poem as a work of visual rather than simply verbal art. While *CIL* 4. 1595 certainly engages in this game, it is also worth noting that it has an aural or verbal element as well, in that the insistent repeated ‘s’ sounds in the poem force the reader—especially if we imagine her as reading the text aloud—to perform the noise which the snake would make. There is thus a lived, experiential aspect of the joke as well, one which is revealed in the very act of reading *serpentis lusus*. As much as many graffiti participate in literate word-play, therefore, they are also certainly aware that they are part of the real-time spoken communication of the ancient street. Another example of this can be seen in *CIL* 4. 4957, inscribed in the plaster to the left of doorway 8. 6. 7:⁶⁷ *miximus in lecto. Fateor, peccavimus, hospes, | si dices ‘quare?’ Nulla matella fuit* (‘We peed in the bed. I confess it, we made a mistake, my host. | If you should ask, “why [did you do it]?”—there wasn’t a chamber pot’). Obviously the humour here turns on the imagined, or reimagined, relationship

⁶⁷ Labelled as 8. 7. 6 in *CIL*, but this is incorrect according to the present numbering of *insulae* and doorways. See *Notizie degli scavi* (1882) 435–6.

between speaker and (supposed) reader, as it pokes fun at the expectations and responsibilities in the interactions between guest and host. As part of its gesture to that lived relationship, *miximus in lecto* represents itself as an oral communication, which is evident not just in its first- and second-person verbs but in its self-conscious use of two words for speaking, *fateor* and *dices*.

At the same time, however, the form of the text is that of an epigram. Its author's familiarity with the construction of the couplet shows in the way that he has given the hexameter, 'epic' line a heavier, more sententious tone with the authorial plurals in *miximus* and *peccavimus* and the formality of 'confess' (*fateor*) and 'sin' (*peccavimus*); this seriousness is then underlined by the 'punchline' of the pentameter, in which we discover that the guest's apology is actually a critique of the host's hospitality. The joke is especially funny given the social role which epigram had taken on by the late first century CE, as guests might send a poem in a note as a thank-you after a dinner or a night spent at a patron's house. Thus, there were both literary and material dimensions to 'social' epigrams; the creation of *CIL* 4. 4957 as a material text—a pseudo-note near a doorway—both enacts and mocks this use of poetry in social exchange. Moreover, the structure of the poem is a canonical one in Latin epigram: a paradoxical statement, a question, and a solution. Thus, Ennius' epitaph runs *Nemo me lacrimis decoret nec funera fletu | faxit. Cur? Volito vivus per ora virum* ('Let no one adorn me with tears, nor follow my funeral with weeping. Why? Living, I fly through the mouths of men').⁶⁸ Similar, although with a Catullan twist, is the famous *Odi et amo. Quare id faciam fortasse requiris? | nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior* ('I hate and I love. Perhaps you ask why I do this? | I don't know, but I understand that it's happening and I'm in pain': Cat. 85). Part of the joke here depends on the reader recognizing the traditional pattern, so that we expect an explanation—denied by the poet—in the sentence which follows the question.

The history of Latin poetry in general, and of epigram in particular, has been framed by the tension between oral and written traditions.⁶⁹ Thus, we may note that the epigrammatic structure already noted—

⁶⁸ The poem is quoted by Cicero at *Tusc. Disp.* I. 34 and 117 and *de Senec.* 73. It may or may not actually have been written by Ennius. For its place in the history of Latin epigram, see Lausberg (1982) 276–7.

⁶⁹ See e.g. Vogt-Spira (1990); Benz (2001); Habinek (2005).

paradoxical statement, question, solution—is clearly that of the riddle, an ancient and deeply popular form of linguistic play.⁷⁰ Although it is clear that Latin poetry had more thoroughly embraced its ‘textuality’ than had the earlier Greek, we certainly know that the Roman world had a widespread culture of spoken poetry, which was performed even in the streets of the ancient city.⁷¹ One of the difficult questions in analysing Pompeian graffiti is determining to what extent it simply represents the material trace of that oral street culture and to what extent it is representing the materialized orality of the epigrammatic tradition. The answer to this question is, I would argue, different for different fragments of graffiti. One thing which we can say, however, about all of the fragments from Pompeii’s walls is that even if the words existed only as verbal communication prior to their inscription, someone took the step of making that communication into a written one—of separating words from the phonetic production of the body, of giving the text a presence which would last beyond the corporeal presence of the writer. As much as *miximus in lecto* makes a joke out of its potentially oral origins, therefore, it also shows its awareness of the material and written tradition of which it is a part.

Of course, it is clear that some graffiti texts have greater literary ambitions than others. That some graffiti have a sense of themselves as parts of a larger written genre is clear, and is manifested by the presence of inscriptions such as the oft-quoted *Admiror paries te non cecidisse ruinis | qui tot scriptorum taedia sustineas* (‘I’m amazed, wall, that you haven’t fallen down in ruins, | since you bear the tedious outpourings of so many writers’). The couplet was found scratched at least three times into the walls of public places in Pompeii (see Figure 0.3 for line drawings of two examples) and is noteworthy for the ways in which it both uses and abuses graffiti as a class of writing, as well as the joke that it has added itself to the weight which burdens the wall. Given this message, the couplet was obviously created to be written on a wall, which has been repeatedly done—testimony not just to one author’s sense of graffiti as a subject of poetry, but also to the fact that such texts could and did ‘travel’ from one place to

⁷⁰ Plato (*Republic* 479b–c) associates riddling with children, but Aristotle sees it as closely allied with the important rhetorical art of metaphor (*Rhetoric* 1405b4–6).

⁷¹ On which, see Ch. 2. Cf. Horsfall (2003) 31–47; O’Neill (2003) 135–76.

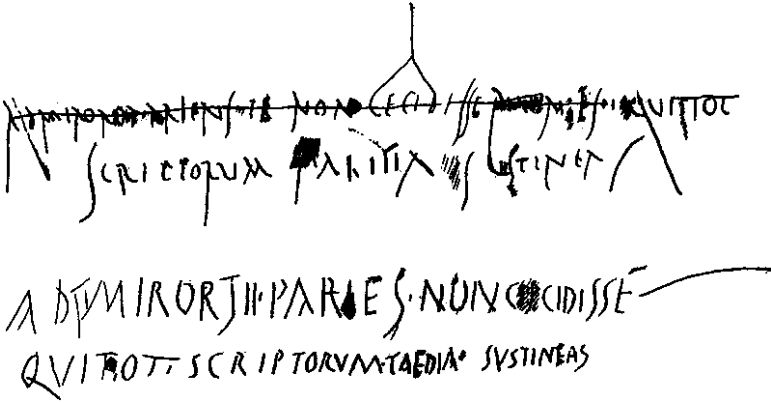


Figure 0.3. Line drawings of *CIL* 4. 1904 and 2461, from *CIL* vol. 4, showing different handwriting styles.

another. Exactly how they did so is open to debate,⁷² but since the couplet appears in different forms and apparently different hands,⁷³ it seems unlikely to have been the same author who simply liked to repeat the joke.

At the same time, however, generalizations about graffiti as a group can be difficult to sustain. This is true not just because they exist in such a wide variety, from simple names to lists of numbers to fragments of poetry, but also because their attachment to the material environment means that even the same text may take on different meanings depending on where it is quoted. The couplet cited earlier, for instance, appears in the basilica in company with a large number of other poetic fragments, the greatest density of both quotations from canonical poets and more ‘independent’ compositions to appear in Pompeii. In this context, and especially if we did not also find it elsewhere in the city, we might see it as having a specific and

⁷² Wachter (1998) would argue that the graffiti are simply material traces of what is fundamentally an oral tradition, but the breadth of quotation from canonical poets found on Pompeian walls also points towards familiarity with written works. Wachter himself (77) notes that if it is the same ‘oral tradition’ which influenced both (for instance) Propertius and the writers of the Pompeian graffiti, it had a surprisingly long and stable lifetime, since the two were probably composed about 100 years apart.

⁷³ Based on the line drawings provided in *CIL* 4 (Tav. XI. 4, 10, 11) of *CIL* 4. 1904, 2461, and 2487 (found in the basilica, the large theatre, and the amphitheatre respectively). See Franklin (1991) 82–3 for line drawings and a discussion.

legitimate cause for complaint about the proliferation of poetry on the basilica's northern wall. Where the couplet is written in the substructures of the amphitheatre, however, there are few neighbouring texts, and those which do appear are far shorter: the next longest which survives is three unintelligible words. Here the couplet seems much more programmatic, less a specific response to its surroundings and more a metatextual joke on the general phenomenon of graffiti writing. This underscores, I think, the ways in which graffiti must be seen to be at once global and local, both connected to the general chorus of voices of the culture which produced them, and simultaneously embedded in the particularity of one material place. They are at the same time texts and objects, and to do justice to their meaning it is necessary to consider both aspects of their existence: how they speak from and to a larger community of readers and writers, and how they function as artefacts of a specific place and moment in time.

One meaning of this double role, I would argue, is that there are two different histories which must be constructed for a graffiti text, one of the written words and one of the material fact of their writing. Of course, on some level this is an artificial distinction, especially since, as I noted, many graffiti display a strong metatextual sense of themselves as artifacts, so that the material form of the text has an effect on what it actually says. At the same time, however, what is being evoked in the act of writing—and especially in the act of writing in the idiom of a particular literary genre—is something external to the material world of the actual inscription, while the materiality of the inscription—the fact that it has specific place and time—contributes an aspect of meaning which is not a part of traditional literary texts. Each of these elements is an important part of determining what an individual graffiti means (now, to us) and meant (to the person who wrote it). Meditating on William Carlos Williams's famous dictum, 'no ideas but in things', Bill Brown has noted that the act of reading itself depends on seeing into an object, of engaging with a thing—the book—which literally has ideas inside.⁷⁴ At the same time, however, literary criticism for a very long time sought to efface the 'thingness' of the text in an effort to find some transcendent meaning in its content; this is a disease which we in classics have found particularly difficult to shake, in part because we are so far

⁷⁴ Brown (2003) 9–11.

removed from the material world within which the objects of our study took shape. Classical philologists have very, very few literary autographs with which we can work. The Pompeian graffiti thus demand from us an uncomfortable critical perspective, one which allows us to perceive that the meaning and the matter of an ancient poem can be inextricable—indeed, coextensive. This is perhaps one reason why ancient graffiti have long lurked on the edge of literary study in classics, able neither to be ignored entirely or embraced wholeheartedly. As I will discuss, this phenomenon can be seen even in the work of the earliest scholars on Pompeii and its inscriptions.

WHAT'S 'LITERARY' ABOUT LITERARY GRAFFITI?

Although Pompeii's wall writings have fascinated and frustrated critics since the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is worth noting that the very earliest workers at the site showed little interest in the words on its walls. In part, this was due to the general focus of the eighteenth-century Bourbon excavators on retrieving large-scale and impressive art objects for the king's collection; in part it resulted from the fact that early scholars simply did not understand what they were seeing on the walls of the ancient city. As late as 1821—seventy years after the first digging at the site—Sir William Gell and John P. Gandy's lavishly illustrated *Pompeiana* could only assert that 'the precise construction [of the wall writings] is still open to the conjectures of the learned'.⁷⁵ It was not until the 1830s that critics began to take notice of the texts, and even then opinions about their value were mixed. Gell, in his 1832 revision to his earlier work, laments that the graffiti are 'not remarkable for correctness of either style or sentiment' and notes that they 'are to be read with difficulty, and without much improvement in morals or orthography'.⁷⁶ Fortunately, from 1839 to 1850 the site of Pompeii was blessed with a director, Francesco Maria Avellino, who was interested not only in studying the writings but in preserving them, and it is due to his efforts that we now possess many of the graffiti-covered plaster fragments in the storerooms of the Naples Archaeological Museum.⁷⁷ Even he,

⁷⁵ Gell and Gandy (1817–18) 116.

⁷⁶ Gell (1832) 30–1. ⁷⁷ As he himself describes in Avellino (1841) 35.

however, notes in one of the first publications devoted to graffiti that the texts appear ‘not very intelligible, obscure, and worthless’ and that when they do make some sense, they are ‘spur-of-the-moment, primal, unsophisticated, and as a result entirely shaped by the characters of the writers.’⁷⁸

Yet Avellino also observed something which would be influential in creating and framing early scholarly interest in the graffiti fragments: ‘If a great man of our time, in reading ancient inscriptions in stone, has truthfully expressed his wonder, observing how frequently a thought has been able to outlast an empire, what would he not say of these light and whimsical marks, through which the strangeness of even a moment and the mere expression of a joke and thoughtlessness survive the destruction of cities and the fall of nations?’⁷⁹ The great man in question, he informs us in a footnote, is Chateaubriand, the influential French Romantic novelist, poet, and cultural critic. On the one hand, then, Avellino here makes explicit the connection of graffiti scholarship with the much older and better respected study of epigraphy, thus creating a scholarly pedigree for the work he is about to undertake. Epigraphy, after all, had been an important part of the humanist and antiquarian project since the middle of the sixteenth century, and the recovery of inscriptions was recognized as one of the major goals of the excavations in the Bay of Naples.⁸⁰ But at the same time, in citing Chateaubriand, a figure of influence in literary circles, Avellino also suggests a different pedigree, one whose connection with the graffiti texts is not as immediately obvious. Chateaubriand had travelled extensively in Italy in 1803–4, although the resulting memoir, *Voyage en Italie*, was not published until 1827. But he had

⁷⁸ ‘si mostrano talvolta poco intelligibili, oscuri, ed anche da nulla; quando però contengono qualche senso, questo ci mostrano spontaneo, nativo, ingeuo, e per conseguenza acconcio oltremodo a caratterizzarne gli scrittori’: Avellino (1841) 4.

⁷⁹ ‘Se un grand’uomo nostro contemporaneo nel leggere le antiche iscrizioni in marmo ha con verità manifestata la sua meraviglia, osservando quanto frequentemente un pensiero ha potuto sopravvivere ad un impero, che non direbbe egli di questi leggieri e capricciosi segni, pe’quali la bizzarria anche di un momento, e la espressione stessa dello scherzo e della spensierataggine sopravvive all’sterminio della città, ed al cader delle nazioni?’: Avellino (1841) 4–5.

⁸⁰ Although not apparently recognized by everyone. Winckelmann, in his famous 1762 indictment of the Bourbon excavations, reports on a large inscription in bronze which was dismantled before it could be read. His indignation over the incident, however, is testimony to the importance which he accorded, and expected his readers to accord, to the epigraphic evidence from the site: Winckelmann (1997) 78.

visited Pompeii and was much impressed, noting that, among other wonders, in the ancient soldiers' barracks one could still see ill-formed words and 'epigrams' written on the walls and columns.⁸¹ Chateaubriand would later briefly recall the visit again in his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, saying simply 'at Pompeii, they showed me a chained skeleton, and some badly-written Latin words, smeared by soldiers on the walls'.⁸²

It thus transpires that Chateaubriand was, as Avellino predicted, struck by the Pompeian graffiti, in part it would seem because of their ordinariness. He calls them 'mots . . . estropiés', 'mal orthographiés', and repeatedly notes that they were 'barbouillés' or 'smeared' on the walls where they were found. In fact, it was Pompeii's lived-in quality which most appealed to Chateaubriand and many of the other Romantics who visited the site; *Voyage en Italie* quotes with approval a letter from J. Taylor to C. Nodier which concludes, 'Rome is just a big museum; Pompeii is a living antiquity'.⁸³ Chateaubriand himself imagines how it would be to restore Pompeii to 'the most wonderful museum in the world . . . A Roman town completely preserved, as if the inhabitants had just stepped out for a walk a quarter of an hour before!'⁸⁴ The embrace of Pompeii in the early nineteenth century has been seen as part of a general movement away from a purely aesthetic appreciation of ancient art towards a 'romantic archaeology' which valued objects for what they might tell the present about the radically different world of the past.⁸⁵ Whereas Herculaneum had long been seen—and treated—as a treasure trove of beautiful paintings and sculptures, Pompeii offered a newly appreciated sense of the ancient urban landscape overall.⁸⁶ Of course, this transition did not happen

⁸¹ 'épigrammes tracées sur les colonnes du quartier des soldats': Chateaubriand (1828) 419.

⁸² 'A Pompéi, on me montra un squelette enchaîné et des mots latins estropiés, barbouillés par des soldats sur des murs': Chateaubriand (1849) 93.

⁸³ 'Rome n'est qu'un vaste musée; Pompéi est une antiquité vivante': Chateaubriand (1828) 423.

⁸⁴ 'le plus merveilleux musée de la terre . . . Une ville romaine conservée tout entière, comme si ses habitants venoient d'en sortir un quart d'heure auparavant!': Chateaubriand (1828) 249.

⁸⁵ On this movement generally, see Levine (1986); Blix (2009).

⁸⁶ 'Museums have been profusely enriched with various articles of use or luxury discovered at Herculaneum. . . but no comprehensive view could be obtained, and consequently no new idea formed of the disposition and appearance of a Roman city. Fortunately, the disappointment was repaired by the discovery of Pompeii . . .' W. Clarke (1846) 4.

all at once, but Chateaubriand was one of the early proponents of leaving excavated material in context in order to appreciate better its historical significance. It is not surprising, therefore, that he and his contemporaries found themselves attracted to those parts of the site most closely associated with the ancient people who dwelt there.⁸⁷ The fact that what lingers in Chateaubriand's memory about Pompeii is 'a chained skeleton, and some badly-written Latin words' testifies to the role which the graffiti played in this drama: the parts of the site he experienced most vividly were the body of a human being and the text which notionally gave him a voice.

The graffiti texts thus seem to have attracted attention in the early to mid-nineteenth century precisely because of their association with a kind of gritty, everyday urbanism—a way of 'summon[ing] as in dreams the voices and the forms of long-since buried men'.⁸⁸ But if Avellino opens his publication of the graffiti with the citation of Chateaubriand, he closes it with a reference to an equally famous Romantic name, albeit somewhat disguised. In the last paragraph of his book, Avellino mentions that a 'learned sig. Woodsword' has authored a book on Pompeian graffiti which shows their remarkable familiarity with canonical ancient poetry. The 'Woodsword' in question is actually Christopher Wordsworth, nephew of the famous poet, who in 1836 had published one of the first critical works which dealt with the wall inscriptions as objects worthy of study. This Wordsworth was an interesting figure in his own right. He went on to become bishop of Lincoln, to write extensively and influentially on ecclesiastical topics, and to pen—although somewhat reluctantly—the authorized biography of his famous uncle. *Inscriptiones Pompeianae*, however, was one of his first publications and it is noteworthy not just for its prescient interest in the graffiti texts but for the insight it offers into mid-nineteenth-century attitudes to such popular writings. It also represents the moment of invention of the category around which this study is framed, as its author both identifies and analyses the 'literariness' of the Pompeian graffiti inscriptions.

From the beginning, however, it is clear that Wordsworth has a rather ambivalent relationship with his chosen subject. He says that he would have 'abstained from this undertaking as unnecessary' if

⁸⁷ Vidler (1992) 45–55.

⁸⁸ Symonds (1873) 342.

anyone else had taken any notice of the fragments, but since so little interest has been displayed on the part of other scholars, and the subject has ‘the merit of novelty’, he has taken up the task.⁸⁹ In fact, he has discovered with some surprise that there are numerous quotations from familiar poets included in the Pompeian scratches, especially on the walls of the basilica. This leads him to a comparison, favourable to antiquity, between popular taste in the ancient and modern worlds: ‘*Our Pompeiis* do not yet exhibit the words of *our Virgils* . . . In Westminster Hall, Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden are remembered by those who plead there; but I doubt whether the mixed audience who listen to the pleadings, would, if left to themselves, beguile their leisure moments by references to the writings of these poets.’⁹⁰ Wordsworth thus assumes, as many have, that the graffiti represent a kind of *vox populi*, that they represent the predilections not of the educated men who spoke before the tribunal in Pompeii’s basilica, but of the ‘mixed audience’ which looked on and admired. This is, of course, a matter of some debate, but my point is that Wordsworth’s attention was particularly attracted by the combination of the popular form of graffiti and the elite texts which they quote—a blend of high and low which indicates to him an enviable sophistication in the tastes of the culture overall. The inscriptions are valuable to Wordsworth not so much for their intrinsic quality, but for the insight they give into the life of the common people of the ancient city.

Curiously, though, in the end Wordsworth reveals that he actually considers the most interesting and worthwhile texts to be those which he chooses not to quote. In closing, he alludes darkly to ‘*other specimens of a different character, which, from their nature, I feel it right to suppress*’ (italics original). It seems likely that it is the erotic graffiti texts to which the author is referring here, although he refuses to elaborate on their content beyond comparing them to the poetry of ‘Catullus, Juvenal, and Martial’. And yet, he goes on, ‘a more important inference than any of those to which I have just alluded may be drawn from these instances [of wall writing]’ and, despite the fact that he deliberately omits these inscriptions from his study, ‘I profess gratitude to God, by whose wonderful order this city was overwhelmed, for their very *preservation* during so many centuries to

⁸⁹ Wordsworth (1837) 2.

⁹⁰ Wordsworth (1837) 6.

this day.’ What is the lesson offered by these apparently unquotable texts? For Wordsworth, they communicate a salutary truth about the ancient world, a warning like ‘the dead bones that whiten on the isle of the Sirens’ which ‘remind [the modern viewer] how and from what he has escaped’. He concludes:

And so in this city of Pompeii, surrounded as we are by the brilliant productions of painting and sculpture, beautiful even in decay, and by the exquisite remains of the soft refinements with which its ancient inhabitants charmed their voluptuous hours, we might be dazzled by their fascination, and almost wish that we had lived as contemporaries with them. But the inscriptions to which I allude warn us against this; they show us with what moral depravity these graceful embellishments were allied. Therefore we neither envy them, nor are we prone to believe that man’s Art or Intellect will ever reform the world. We no longer indulge in such a dream, nor question the justice of Providence which buried Pompeii in the dust.⁹¹

The passage is striking, and not merely for the rhetorical flourish with which it describes a subject considered by the author unspeakable. Wordsworth’s point here is that the graffiti represent the hidden reality of the Roman world, a reality which, if known, serves to dispel the seductive lure of the antique. Without the wall texts, Pompeii—and, by extension, ancient culture generally—is a dangerous trap for the modern viewer; the graffiti, however, serve to remind us that the present is morally, if not artistically, the superior time in which to live.

As I noted, Wordsworth would go on to be ordained, become a bishop, and write extensively about theology, so it is not surprising that his book on the Pompeian inscriptions ultimately takes on the character of a sermon. What is more significant to my mind, however, is his sense that the graffiti have a privileged relationship with ancient culture. On the one hand, they show the extent to which an artistic sensibility pervaded Pompeian society on every level, and on the other, they offer insight into the fundamental ethical character of that society which would not otherwise be available to us. Wordsworth thus reflects the new-found sense of the mid-nineteenth century that ‘primitive’ and unmediated art forms like graffiti were particularly valuable, since they illustrated the power of human kind’s most basic creative urges.⁹² Yet unlike the studies of pictorial

⁹¹ Wordsworth (1837) 32–3.

⁹² Sheon (1976) 16–22.

graffiti which were published later in the century, and which emphasized the ways in which graffiti pictures were unadulterated by the touch of elite art forms,⁹³ Wordsworth notes that many of Pompeii's textual wall inscriptions showed awareness of canonical ancient authors. For him, therefore, the graffiti must be understood as art as much as 'the brilliant productions of painting and sculpture' which seduce the modern viewer, and they should be treated with as much—if not more—respect and caution. While we may disagree with his conclusions, it is worth noting that Wordsworth in essence invents the category of 'literary graffiti' and draws attention to questions with which critics have continued to struggle up until the present day.

One of those questions is how we should understand the material or real-world aspects of particular types of Latin poetry.⁹⁴ For instance, the graffito poem which I discuss in Chapter 4, also known as *CIL* 4. 5296, made its most significant impact on the scholarly record as a real-time instance of the *paraclausithyron* or 'the song before the closed door'.⁹⁵ In this motif, the poet/lover arrives in the night at the house of his beloved, to find the door barred against him; distressed, he sits down upon the doorstep and composes a poem about his sufferings, which is sometimes described as written on or pinned to the impassable door. The *paraclausithyron* has a history in ancient literature which stretches back to Aristophanes; the owner of a pretty slave-girl complains in Plautus' *Mercator*, *impleantur elegeorum meae fores carbonibus* ('my doors are full of elegies [written in] charcoal': 409). By the time of Latin elegy where the *paraclausithyron* achieves its fully fledged form, however, the motif has taken on greater significance than simply representing a real social practice: it comes to be used as a symbol of the composition of love songs generally or even poetry as a whole.⁹⁶ Far from describing an actual material activity, therefore, the *paraclausithyron* illustrates how deeply enmeshed elegy, particularly, was with the urban environment and the people who inhabited it. Even though the poem notionally represents an

⁹³ e.g. Töpffer (1858) 104–11; Champfleury (1865) 186–205.

⁹⁴ e.g. Rudolf Wachter (1998) has used the graffiti to consider the influence of oral transmission on poetic composition; Horsfall (2003) 64–5 sees them as evidence of a certain kind of popular poetic tradition; Gigante (1979) uses them to outline the 'Hellenistic' literary culture of the ancient city.

⁹⁵ Copley (1939) 333–49, followed by Goold (1998) 16–29.

⁹⁶ To symbolize elegy: Tibullus 2. 6. 12–14; Propertius 3. 3. 47–9; Ovid, *Amores* 2. 1. 17–20 and 3. 1. 53–4. To symbolize poetry generally: Ovid, *Fasti* 4. 109–13.

isolated and personal expression by the poet to his beloved, the forced location of that expression in the street ‘explains’ the publication of the text in the public sphere. As Elegy herself remarks in *Amores* 3. 1. 53–4, *a quotiens foribus duris infixā pependi | non verita a populo praetereunte legi!* (‘Ah, how often have I hung, fixed to hard doors, | not fearing to be read by the populace passing by!’).

The idea of graffiti—or, at any rate, what we might call public inscription—is thus used in the *paraclausithyron* to grapple with one of elegy’s central issues, namely, the role of the poet as public speaker of private emotions. At the same time, however, Latin elegy generally is a genre which continuously plays with its own relationship to history and the material world.⁹⁷ Rather than evidence of the historical ‘reality’ of the *paraclausithyron*, then, the existence of a graffiti poem on a doorpost may instead simply attest to the power of suggestion, evidence of what someone does who is in love and has read one too many elegiac poets. Or, worse yet, it may show the existence of someone who is fully aware of the genre’s tropes as tropes, and has composed and written the poem as an elaborate joke, a material realization of what is understood to be actually only a literary device. Questions concerning the boundary between the text and the historical context which produced it are necessarily central to the discipline of classical studies, which depends on literature as an important source for writing the history of the ancient world. But in the case of graffiti these questions have been especially difficult to answer, since we have only a minimal understanding of what wall writing meant in antiquity either as a literary or a historical activity. It is my hope that this study will take some steps towards redressing that scholarly gap. I aim not just to make a contribution to understanding graffiti’s substantive role in the history of Latin literature—e.g. its formal relationship to inscribed and literary epigram—but also to appreciating its metaphorical role within canonical texts—as, for instance, a material touchstone for Roman elegy. In this way, we can see Pompeii’s graffiti not just as archaeological and cultural curiosities, but as important and understudied parts of the early imperial Roman literary scene.

In the first chapter, ‘Landscape and Literature in the Roman City’, I argue that graffiti in Pompeii should not be understood as illicit or

⁹⁷ Kennedy (1992) esp. 1–23.

criminal in the same way that they are generally seen in the modern world. Because of lower levels of literacy among the ancient urban population, and a concomitantly different culture of urban texts, the creation of 'private' writing in public space was more acceptable, representing a popular echo of the posting of formal dedicatory or commemorative inscriptions by the elite. This chapter then goes on to look at several individual graffiti which illustrate the relationship between such wall writings and the literary tradition as a whole, in particular, canonical epigram. I conclude that graffiti poetry represents a meeting point between epigraphic and canonical literature, showing perhaps surprising awareness of and affinities with both sets of texts. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of graffiti and ekphrasis, in the context of paintings which adorned the walls of cookshops and taverns in Pompeii. Here my intent is to examine the relationship between 'popular' visual and verbal arts, and to argue that the addition of words to the images suggests a genuine awareness of the role which literary texts could play in creating the urban landscape.

Chapter 2, 'Poetic Politics, Political Poetics', looks at civic life. I begin by considering the programmata, which are the best known and most visible form of wall writing in ancient Pompeii. Although the programmata generally are couched in the most unvarnished and direct terms, there are places where literary forms are used to support the aspirations of the candidate. This is striking because graffiti poetry is overwhelmingly represented in our historical texts from the Roman Empire as critical of elite politics. Although there certainly are some examples from Pompeian walls of disparaging political epigrams—generally found among the scratched rather than painted texts—literary forms are used to champion as much as to attack the political status quo. This chapter concludes with a discussion of a set of texts which have been little studied because they were excavated too late to be included in the standard reference work on Pompeian graffiti, the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. These graffitied inscriptions were found well inside a large house on the Via dell'Abbondanza, and several of them refer explicitly to the Emperor Nero and his wife Poppaea in what may be parodic terms. Yet the final inscription in the list is a vow made by a freedman and a slave, asking for the master's safety—a strangely earnest and sincere addition to the list. I argue that this illustrates the way in which political poetry could be and was marshalled for use in different contexts and to serve different ends in the ancient urban environment.

The third chapter turns away from social history to a more strictly 'literary' topic, namely how graffiti writers understood themselves as authors, and the relationship between their work and that of canonical poets. In 'Authorship, Appropriation, Authenticity', I begin with a small group of texts which have been fully canonized, assigned an authorial persona (on the strength of the signature 'Tiburtinus' found with the first poem), and accepted as 'real' literature in the scholarly record. Tiburtinus is the only actual named author to have emerged from the Pompeian material and, as such, he provides an important case study of how and why some texts are understood to be genuinely literary while others are not. By way of comparison, I offer the example of a group of quotations from Pompeii's basilica, where couplets from Ovid and Propertius are listed along with other, less recognizable, fragments. I argue that this list should also be seen as 'authored', in perhaps different terms but on the same level as those by 'Tiburtinus'. In fact, I go on to suggest, the aesthetic of appropriation which is displayed in the list from the basilica is more commonly the style of authorship employed in Pompeian graffiti. This can be seen expressed in the way that epistolary texts are represented in the corpus of wall writings, as even 'personal' letters are written using generic forms and phrases, and in certain widely-circulated and -repeated poetic *sententiae* found in multiple contexts and combinations throughout Pompeii and Herculaneum. All of these show that originality, which was certainly a prized quality among canonical poets, was much less so in the streets of the ancient city, suggesting contrasting and competing modes of authorship between elite and popular cultures.

Chapter 4, 'Gender and Genre: The Case of *CIL* 4. 5296', concerns a single poem which I argue represents the only female homoerotic love poem to survive from the ancient Roman world. I use the poem to discuss authorship and identity in graffiti poetry, a medium which gives us access to the voices of those not heard in the canon of ancient Latin poetry. Although the writing of ancient graffiti may not have been transgressive in modern terms, its distinct mode of authorship nonetheless gave space to non-elite authors to create distinct types of poetry. By looking closely at *CIL* 4. 5296 and the texts found nearby which respond to it, we can see how graffiti authors both use and resist tropes from the canonical elegiac genre to create a space for themselves and their poetry. This chapter concludes with an appendix which describes and discusses the archaeological context in which

CIL 4. 5296 was found, itself a curiosity and one which has not been described or considered in the scholarly record.

Canonization is also discussed in the final chapter, ‘A Culture of Quotation: Virgil, Education, and Literary Ownership’. Here I consider places where lines from Virgil’s *Aeneid*—perhaps the most widely-read work in Roman education—are found quoted on the walls of the ancient city. I argue that, instead of dismissing these quotations as the work of schoolboys (the traditional interpretation), we must see them as part of a wider culture of literary consumption. We have known for many years that the story of Aeneas enjoyed a ‘popular’ following under the early Roman Empire, a fact which is illustrated in Pompeii by the wide variety of representations of the hero found there, ranging from panel paintings in elite houses to small decorative terracotta statuettes. Yet there has been little discussion of how the text of Virgil penetrated the street life of the city, beyond the common assertion that ‘everyone’ knew the first few words of the *Aeneid*. In this chapter, therefore, I use Virgil’s most thoroughly canonized work to consider what I call the culture of quotation in the urban environment of Pompeii, beginning with the simple question of what it actually meant—to writer and potential reader—when someone wrote *arma virumque* on a wall. I argue that the canonization of the first words of the *Aeneid* made them both deeply meaningful and completely meaningless, a shorthand way of gesturing to a wider Roman literary culture. At the same time, however, quotations from other parts of Virgil’s epic text, as well as from his other works, show a broader knowledge of Rome’s most canonized poet, but one which focuses on the use and meaning of individual lines and phrases rather than of the work as a whole. Ultimately, the culture of literary quotation in the streets of Pompeii turns out to be one which prioritizes the quoted fragment as a means of communication, so that the *Aeneid* speaks in this popular context not as a single, unified, and canonized poem, but as an atomized and utilitarian series of pieces of text.

This study proceeds from a perspective which prioritizes the literary aspects of Pompeian graffiti, by which I mean that it seeks to illuminate and evaluate the connections between elite Latin literature and that which was written on certain ancient Roman walls. This is emphatically not, however, to say that a graffitied epigram is the same as one by Martial which has been preserved in the manuscript tradition; not only do the two texts differ in their history as objects,

but they clearly originate from very different places in the Roman social milieu, and have correspondingly occupied very different places in the study of Latin literature. Stephen Hinds has recently suggested that ‘Roman elite self-positioning . . . involves identification with and processing of experience through canonical texts’, a point which he supports by reference to a poetic graffito from Egypt.⁹⁸ This reading is fairly uncontroversial, given the text in question, which we know was written by a wealthy and well-educated Roman, even if it is slightly complicated by the fact that she was a woman. The Pompeian graffiti writers are more difficult to situate within the social hierarchy of the time, and their writings have—for this and other reasons—mostly languished outside the purview of classical literary scholars. This study is an attempt to fill in that gap, but it represents only one possible approach to only one possible subset of the evidence. Because of the volume of the material and its remarkable spread across the cityscape, it will always be necessary to see the Campanian graffiti simultaneously as a coherent body and a disparate collection of individual texts. The goal of this study is to see new patterns within the whole by comparing and contrasting, combining and recombining, different elements and methodologies in an effort to see the place of literature in the urban landscape of Pompeii.

⁹⁸ Hinds (2010) 369–85, at 381.

1

Landscape and Literature in the Roman City

It has become a scholarly commonplace to remark that the ancient Roman city had, at least after the time of Augustus, a wide, varied, and almost omnipresent regime of writing in public. This regime included texts of many different types, commercial, political, dedicatory; written with charcoal, paint, stylus, or chisel; on stone, wood, plaster, and mortar; on private houses, public monuments, temples, shops, baths, fountains, and tombs.¹ In part, this pervasiveness of public writing is due to what has come to be known as the ‘epigraphic habit’, the characteristically Roman practice of recording acts and events on stone.² From the late Republic onwards, both public and private individuals who had even marginal means to hire a stonemason left behind inscriptions—honorific, commemorative, funerary—which document multiple aspects of social life, from birth to death. Many of these texts have direct ties to civic authority: decrees of the Senate or the Emperor; dedicatory texts on buildings by consuls, tribunes, or other magistrates; milestones, boundary markers, altars, statue bases, and the like, all of which record the names of the officials responsible for their placement. The production of such publicly-readable texts, however, was not simply the purview of the state. Wealthy private individuals also could and did erect monumental inscriptions, which often recorded some act of public beneficence like the construction of a building or the presentation of gladiatorial games. Other writing was less formal. Thus, in Pompeii, the famous *cave canem* mosaic marked the threshold of the House of the Tragic Poet; a bakery

¹ For an overview, see Corbier (2006b) 53–75.

² The term was coined by R. McMullen (1982) 233–46.

featured a terracotta plaque with a phallus and the perhaps aspirational legend *hic habitat felicitas* ('here dwells good fortune'); and the front sign of the cookshop of Euxinus announces *Phoenix felix et tu* ('the phoenix is lucky, and so may you be!'). As William Harris once noted, 'Roman cities . . . were full of things to read'.³

This proliferation of public texts under the Roman Empire has made it the traditional centre of the study of ancient epigraphy, a field which has recently seen a resurgence of critical interest. Scholars have provided a comprehensive yet nuanced account of the writing culture of the Romans—a culture which has been seen to encompass everything from the formal inscriptions in stone or metal commissioned by the political elite to the popular verses scratched on statues by a disgruntled populace.⁴ Although these texts originate from different places in Roman society, nevertheless they share particular things: an understanding of the power of writing to communicate beyond an immediate circle of listeners; an interest in the ways that the material word was associated with authority; an appreciation of writing as an art in and of itself.⁵ It is true that we should not underestimate the oral aspects of ancient culture, especially popular culture, which are not as accessible to us as those which were written down; nevertheless, it is also clear that even within the non-elite segments of Roman society, orality existed side by side with writing, something which can be seen in the proliferation of placards, pamphlets, signage, and graffiti. Scholars have been rightly cautious about drawing too grand a conclusion about the range of literacy in the ancient populace on the basis of this evidence, but it seems likely that a large number of people could read a little bit, such as names, common words, simple phrases.⁶ Thus, it seems safe to assert that writing had an important,

³ Harris (1989) 91.

⁴ There has been an explosion of bibliography in recent years, but see (e.g.) Poucet (1989) 285–311; Meyer (1990) 74–96; R. Thomas (1992*b*) 158–70; Demougín (1994); Woolf (1994) 84–98 and Bowman (1994) 109–25; A. E. Cooley (2002); Corbier (2006*a*) *passim*.

⁵ Again, for an overview, see Corbier (2006*d*) 9–50. For the *jeux de lettres* more specifically, and its relationship to status and power in Roman society, see Purcell (1995) 3–37 and Habinek (2009) 114–40.

⁶ It is also worth noting that different people could probably read different types of writing: Hermeros in the *Satyricon* famously remarks that he can read *lapidarias litteras* ('stone letters': Petronius, *Sat.* 58. 7), by which he seems to mean the block capitals commonly used for inscriptions, drawing a distinction between such lettering

even if difficult to define completely, place in Roman culture at all different levels of the social hierarchy.

On the other hand, the focus on the ubiquity of writing in the imperial Roman city has served to obscure the places in the urban environment where we might expect to find writing but do not. For instance, the ancient city entirely lacked architectural identifiers, that is, signs which describe a building's function ('Library'; 'City Hall'), which actually do not come into regular use until the nineteenth century.⁷ Similarly, street signs and those identifying houses and businesses were, to the extent that they existed, pictorial; indeed, it is not entirely clear that most streets even had names, although there were certainly some exceptions.⁸ A stranger to the city would have had to ask directions from a local passer-by, which would then have been given by referring to easily recognizable landmarks such as fountains, temples, or porticoes.⁹ Town houses were known by the names of their owners, as were businesses, although inns were perhaps associated with the painted images out front which identified them.¹⁰ With a single exception, which is more of an inscribed joke than a genuine effort at advertising, we have no evidence that shops or taverns listed in verbal form what goods they had for sale.¹¹ Moreover, in contrast with the modern city, the ancient displayed no local expressions of civic regulations. Thus, for instance, we know that traffic within the city was restricted in certain ways, certainly spatially and perhaps temporally as well, but as far as we can tell this information was not displayed in the streets affected.¹² Drivers were simply expected to

and (e.g.) the cursive found in handwritten documents. For a discussion of the different types of lettering, see Corbier (2006a) 80–4.

⁷ Cunningham (2000) 143–61.

⁸ It is worth noting that the best evidence which we have for street names in Pompeii are inscriptions in Oscan, which the majority of the populace may well not have been able to read by the time of the city's destruction. For an overview of Pompeii's 'streetscape' see Kaiser (2011) 67–105.

⁹ As in Terrence's *Adelphi*, 572–84. Ling (1990) 204–14.

¹⁰ e.g. the Inn of the Cimbric Shield in the Forum Romanum (Cicero, *de Oratore* 2. 266; Quintilian 6. 3. 38).

¹¹ The inscription—(H)ABEMUS IN CENA PULLUM PISCEM PERNAM PAONEM ('we have for dinner chicken, fish, ham, peacock')—is in the form of a dicing board, with six words (or word groups) of six letters each. See Ferrua (1964) 3–44, at 34 n. 178. Cf. Purcell (1995) 24.

¹² The temporal restrictions on vehicular traffic in Rome during the day are known from the Tabula Heracleensis, a bronze tablet from Heraclea in the Gulf of Tarentum.

know, and if they didn't, presumably someone would have had to tell them.¹³

In sum, then, we might say that there were almost no texts in the ancient urban environment that someone would be *required* to read in order to negotiate basic living in the city. This evidence has been used in the past to argue for a very low level of literacy in the Roman general population. Yet the multiplicity of other kinds of texts with which the ancient city bristled argues against this. It is true that the contrast is striking, and should, I think, cause us to consider not just what bare percentage of people in the Roman street were literate, but what kind of literacy people displayed: what was writing and reading actually used for, and what can that tell us about what it meant for an individual to create and consume written texts? This chapter has two goals: first, to give a more nuanced picture of the wider regime of public writing into which Pompeian graffiti insert themselves, and from there to suggest some reasons why graffiti writing in antiquity meant something different from what it does in the modern day; second, to consider the role that literary forms had in Pompeian public writing generally and what influence that had on the graffiti texts with which it shared space. Ultimately, I think we must see a far more porous boundary between formal epigraphic texts and graffiti than might have been expected, as well as a significant 'literary' presence in both formal and informal wall-writings beyond what has been explored by scholars.

Although the law specifically refers to Rome, the fact that it was posted in an Italian municipality may indicate that the regulations also applied there. See Robinson (1992) 62–5. The spatial restrictions on traffic in Pompeii, mostly in terms of one- and two-way streets, have been studied through the patterns of wheel ruts: see (e.g.) Poehler (2006) 53–74. Poehler suggests the possibility that there was a handbook for drivers (74) which laid out the laws for driving in the city. This seems unlikely to me, given what we know about levels of education and literacy rates among the working classes, but does underscore the problem: we have evidence that people obeyed civic regulations but little information concerning how they knew about them.

¹³ Cf. W. Harris's remark, 'It seldom if ever occurred to anyone to display official or honorific texts in the Subura . . . under the principate the choice [of where to display edicts] did not often express much governmental interest in communicating directly with ordinary citizens': (1989) 208. Even C. Williamson, who in general sees the written publication of legal documents as an important part of the 'public' nature of Roman law, notes that 'Despite the pervasiveness of writing, Rome remained a predominately oral culture whose primary agents of publication were heralds and whose primary means of publicizing information were proclamation and debate': (2005) 312.

AUTHORSHIP AND AUTHORITY

In considering the culture of public writing in the ancient world, we might begin with the principle that very few people then would have understood mass literacy to be a civic right, or a responsibility of the state. In the modern day, we are accustomed to associating the number of people who read and write in a given society with its success, economically and politically: we lament the number of people in countries in the developed world who cannot read despite the extensive system of public education; we urge emerging nations to create programmes to teach their citizens to read and write on the principle that it will help those individuals become more active and useful members of their societies. In antiquity, however, with the exception of a few philosophers, no one seems to have entertained seriously the idea that elementary education should be provided to everyone. It is true that we have a small amount of evidence from the Roman Empire of teachers who were paid by the state, but these were generally men who taught at higher levels, instructing young men in rhetoric and composition—skills which they would need to become effective participants in civic life.¹⁴ These young men were expected to have learned reading and writing already, from a schoolmaster or private tutor paid by their parents. Literacy was something which was purchased, by a person or for him or her by someone else. Very few people would have thought of knowledge of the written word as something which it was the job of the state to provide.

In a sense, this was both the cause and the result of the fact that mass literacy was not an expectation in the ancient Roman world. It is true that one function of inscriptions was communication, to notify the populace of new laws, decrees, expectations, and promises of the government, and, especially as the Empire grew larger, to spread knowledge of events in the capital to far-flung provinces. On the other hand, there were also a number of oral practices which went

¹⁴ Bonner (1977) 157–62. Note that candidates for these positions were expected to demonstrate their skills in a display speech, which indicates the scope of the position, and that upper-level teachers were exempted from taxes and various civic duties. The exemption, however, was specifically denied to primary school teachers: ‘the general principle underlying the granting of exemptions was that their recipients should already be performing a service valuable to their city; medicine and *litterae humaniores* were accepted as a valid qualification, whereas, illogical though it may seem, primary teaching was not’ (Bonner (1977), 160).

along with the written text and which made the actual reading of it less necessary. Thus, statutes were read out in assemblies before their final passage;¹⁵ local poets/town-criers/gossipmongers called *circulatores* made sure that news was spread throughout the city; it has been suggested that the famous painting from Pompeii which depicts an inscription in the forum shows one (literate) man reading it to another (illiterate).¹⁶ Heralds (*praecones*), selected for their loud voices (Mart. 5. 56), were important members of the staffs of many different magistrates, but scribes (*scribae*) were less ubiquitous.¹⁷ Cicero and his brother Quintus as children learned by heart the Twelve Tables *ut carmen necessarium* ('as an essential formula': *de leg.* 2. 59), which should serve to remind us of the important role which memory served in ancient Roman society. Some orators and historians clearly could and did consult inscriptions (e.g. Livy 7. 3. 5–8) as historical documents, but even words cut in stone could be unreliable. Note Cicero's scathing condemnation of Caecilius Metellus Scipio, who was confused about his own grandfather's career and mistook Scipio Africanus for Publius Scipio Nasica Serapio in an honorary inscription (*Ad Att.* 6. 1. 17).

It is clear, however, that the effect of a public inscription is by no means limited to what it says. Because of the association between public inscriptions and memory, contests over civic power sometimes were manifested in struggles over the material texts which recorded acts and events. Dio preserves the entertaining story of Cicero's conflict with Clodius over the tablets on the Capitoline which recorded the former's exile: during his campaign to restore his good name, Cicero led a group up the hill and took them down, but Clodius stole them back and, by implication, reposted them. Cicero was then forced to wait for his enemy to be out of town before he could take them down again (Dio 39. 21. 1–2). Pliny the Younger sees the degeneracy of the Claudian period represented in the fact that the imperial freedman Pallas was honoured by an inscription posted on the statue of Julius Caesar: 'it seemed insufficient that the Senate House should be witness of such great shame; the most crowded place was selected, in which these things might be displayed to be read by those in the present day, and in the future'.¹⁸ Of course, one of

¹⁵ Crawford (1996) 33; Bodel (2001) 16.

¹⁶ Harris (1989) 34.

¹⁷ Hinard (1976) 730–46; Harris (1989) 208.

¹⁸ *Parum visum tantorum dedecorum esse curiam testem: delectus est celeberrimus locus, in quo legenda praesentibus, legenda futureis proderentur*: Pliny, *Epis.* 8. 6. 14.

the time-honoured ways of creating and maintaining social influence in Rome was the construction and restoration of public buildings, which would then advertise the beneficence of their patrons through the inscriptions on their facades. This advertisement would not only promote the reputation of the funding aristocrat in the present day, but also support that of future generations of the same family, due to the notional permanence of the building and the inscription upon it.¹⁹ As Cicero writes, about Quintus Lutatius Catulus' restoration of the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus, 'the eternal memory of your name is sanctified at the same time as that temple' (*tui nominis aeterna memoria simul cum templo illo consecratur*: *Verr.* 2. 4. 31. 69). By contrast, Suetonius sees Domitian's tyranny as represented in the fact that, when he restored buildings damaged by fire, he put up inscriptions in his own name, but failed to commemorate the original builders (*Suet. Dom.* 5).

In part because of the widespread use of monumental writing in aristocratic self-representation, there was clearly a close association in the Roman mind between public inscriptions, names, and, by extension, identity.²⁰ Indeed, Greg Woolf has argued that this is one reason for the spread of what he calls epigraphic culture through the Roman Empire in the first centuries CE: he sees it as a way for a population increasingly dislocated and socially mobile to establish their sense of themselves and their relationships with one another.²¹ Although he ties this in particular to the temporal permanence of inscriptions in stone or on bronze, we will see later (Chapter 3) that the far less durable graffiti texts from Pompeii share a similar concern with locating their authors within a wider social world. This, I will argue, suggests that writing itself, independent of its medium, was important in self-recognition and the maintenance of social identities. But, in more general terms, the close connection between inscription and naming also meant that the Romans had little impulse towards creating anonymous public texts of the kind to which we are so inured in modern Western cities. It is worth noting, for instance, that the two most significant 'advertisements' which survive from

¹⁹ Corbier (2006a) 13–17; Wallace-Hadrill (1990) 143–81.

²⁰ Eck (1984) 129–67; Corbier (2006a) 13–17, 66–70.

²¹ Woolf (1996) 22–39. In a later work, Woolf makes the point that local populations may have adopted Roman social and cultural practices, including the creation of inscriptions, as simply a general language of power, meaning that they did not necessarily associate it with asserting a Roman identity: Woolf (1998) 78.

Pompeii—the notice offering the *Insula Arriana Polliana* for rent (*CIL* 4. 138), and that which puts forward the *Praedia of Julia Felix* for sale (*CIL* 4. 1136)—both foreground the names of the property’s owners to an extent far beyond what would be required for sense or practicality. The ‘for rent’ sign provides all four of the owner’s names (Cn. Alleius Nigidius Maius) twice in the course of a twenty-nine-word text, and the line of text containing *Julia Felix*’s name in the ‘for sale’ notice is twice the size of the lettering which describes the property.²² My point is that the issue in the ancient Roman city with anonymous written texts like street signs was not simply whether the general populace had enough literacy to make them worthwhile. It was also a broader question about whether, how, and why public writing could exist independent of a named authority.

Pompeii’s general lack of what we might call anonymously authoritative texts—statements of information, location, prohibition, and permission—is, I would argue, important for considering the cultural context within which the ancient graffiti texts emerge. In the modern day, we are accustomed to thinking of graffiti writing as a transgressive, sometimes criminal act, at least in part because we see public space as ‘owned’ by the normative forces in a community and the culturally approved writing which appears there as reflecting a kind of vast and nameless communal authority. In this context, graffiti offend because they notionally represent the triumph of an individual’s right to free expression over the dominant society’s common power and interest—an attempt to steal space from the rest of the community.²³ Indeed, the origins of modern subway graffiti during the 1970s among the dispossessed youth of the South Bronx testifies to this conceptual framework, as it arose as a way for them to establish a kind of ownership of public property in a city which sought to efface them.²⁴ Fab Five Freddy, a famous graffiti writer, articulated the sense of threat which this provoked when he said in 1982, ‘When those who don’t like it think of graffiti, they are really scared, because the first image that comes to their mind is that more and more of their world is going to get written over.’²⁵ Denizens in the ancient city,

²² Cf. Mark Pobjoy’s observation that magistrates in Pompeii and elsewhere would put up inscriptions naming and celebrating themselves, even when the act so commemorated was merely a standard aspect of their positions: (2000) 77–92.

²³ S. Stewart (1987) 161–80.

²⁴ Rose (1994) 34.

²⁵ Quoted in Moufarrege (1982) 87–93, at 89.

however, were not afflicted with this sense of the danger posed by 'private' writing, because—perhaps paradoxically—public space and the assertion of individual identities were not seen as incompatible. Writing on walls in the ancient Roman city was not an act of disobedience or destruction in the way that it has become in the modern West precisely because writing was both more and less available to people generally. On the one hand, the proliferation of formal inscriptions suggested that the urban environment was a natural and appropriate place for written performances of identity; on the other, the fact that writing was not generally used incidentally or anonymously in public space meant that the creation of a written text there could still be a gesture both powerful and meaningful.

In considering the relationship between ancient Roman graffiti and more conventional types of public writing, it is worth turning aside from Pompeii for one moment to consider a boundary stone found in Rome. It records, in a formal inscription, the edict of a praetor forbidding dumping in the Esquiline Field: 'No one should wish to have made a burial fire or to have dumped rubbish or a corpse within the boundaries near the city.'²⁶ The phraseology of the beginning here (*ne quis . . . velit*) is traditional in such formal prohibitions, an impersonal version of the standard conversational negative imperative *noli*. David Daube attributes the use of the impersonal in such legal texts to 'politeness, refinement, unwillingness to use a brutal imperative or jussive'²⁷—in other words, the Romans seem to have felt that edicts should be couched in a more lofty, generalizing tone rather than as a direct address to the reader.²⁸ This is particularly emphasized by the fact that, on one stone beneath the inscription of the praetor's edict against dumping, someone subsequently painted his own, private endorsement of the rule: *stercus longe aufer ne malum habeas* ('take your soil far away from here lest you suffer evil').²⁹ It is curious that someone should take the trouble to write this sentence, since it adds

²⁶ The full text runs, *L. Sentius C. f. pr(aetor) de Sen(atus) sen(entia) loca terminanda coer(avit). B(onum) f(actum). Nei quis intra terminos proprius urbem ustrinam fecisse velit nive stercus cadaver iniecisse velit: CIL 6. 31615*. On this and the other copies of the decree, see A. E. Gordon (1951) 75–92.

²⁷ Daube (1956) 39.

²⁸ On the use of abstraction in the jurists and its influence, see Frier (1985) 163–71. Direct address is the standard mode for modern English signage, particularly of prohibition: 'Beware shallow water'; 'Please pick up after your dog'; 'Stop'.

²⁹ Bruns (1893) 181.

little in terms of content to the edict above it. But especially for this reason, it is worth considering the idea that the graffito here is meaningful as a graffito, that is, its significance lies in the fact that it speaks not with the voice of civic authority but with that of an ordinary citizen. This is reinforced by the difference in phraseology, as the impersonal and abstract language of the edict becomes a direct address from writer to reader. While the *ne quis velit* of the law strives to communicate permanence and neutrality, the imperative and second-person verb of the graffito create an immediacy and a kind of intimacy through the linguistic tools of conversation.

In other words, it would be a mistake to think that the graffito on the boundary stone was attempting to take something away from the authority of the edict by 'stealing' some of its space. Instead, it seems to be trying to add to the impact of the inscribed notice a sense of the local and personal. This sense is especially appropriate in this case, since the crime of dumping would seem to have significant local effects.³⁰ This is not to say that the person who wrote the text on the boundary stone necessarily lived nearby (although the inference is tempting), but the fact of the graffito shows that at some point someone was present in that place who cared enough to write the admonition—an implied corporeal presence behind the text which both adds to its feeling of human connection and gives some weight to its final vague threat. I have commented before on the 'private' voice of graffiti (see the Introduction), of which this is clearly an extension. In addition, however, what is displayed on this boundary stone is the way in which graffiti texts could and did claim for themselves a kind of authority which was connected to, but different from, formal civic power.

In Pompeii, we see another version of this in a group of texts which, initially, seem to violate the principle that the ancient city did not contain many instances of 'incidental' authoritative writing. These are the oft-quoted *cacator, cave malum* ('shitter, beware evil') signs, which appear in various public places in the ancient cities around the Bay of Naples and which seem to be designed to keep people from fouling the footpath.³¹ These were locally generated, something

³⁰ John Bodel calls the graffito 'a personal plea' from 'a concerned resident': Bodel (1986) 1–133, at 32. On the general problem of hygiene in the ancient Roman city, see Scobie (1986) 399–433.

³¹ Note that *cave malum* might mean either 'beware lest you do evil' or 'beware lest evil be done to you (as punishment for dumping)': *OLD caveo* 2a, c; 4a.

which can be seen in the fact that they were made in different media—some are painted, some scratched into plaster, some written with charcoal—and in seemingly random locations. Rather than being uniformly scattered across the cityscape, as they would be if this were some kind of general ordinance, they tend to cluster on particular street corners and outside town gates. Even the terms in which they are conventionally expressed are not explicitly prohibitive; by inference, and comparison with the few others which are more direct in their wording, we conclude that they are intended to prevent particular areas from being soiled, but *cacator, cave malum* sounds more religious or ethical than legislative.³² One of them even elaborates: *cacator, cave malum aut si contempseris habeas Iove(m) iratum* ('Shitter, beware evil, or if you should scorn [*sc.* the warning] may you have an angry Jupiter': *CIL* 4. 7716). Indeed, it would appear that one important use of these signs was to protect tombs from desecration, so that the two instances of *cacator* signs in Pompeii from the city gates should probably be associated with the burials just a few yards away.³³ One of these two, outside the Nucernian Gate, varies the usual formula and reads *Cacator sic valeas ut tu hoc locum trasea* ('Shitter, you would do well should you pass this place by'), and reinforces its message with an accompanying image: two large snakes, grassy terrain, and an altar, a landscape into which the sign is incorporated in the form of a plaque (see Figure 1.1).

This snakes-and-altar painted combination is familiar from domestic *lararia*, and seems to have been a standard way of signalling that an otherwise unremarkable place is worthy of respect.³⁴ Another similar sign from Rome—in fact, from a reused portion of Nero's Golden House—features the same image, along with an inscription which makes the point explicit: *duodeci(m) deos et Deana(m) et*

³² It is worth comparing *CIL* 3. 1966, a formal inscription from Dalmatia, which reads in part *QUISQ IN EO VICO STERCUS NON POSUERIT AUT NON CACAVERIT AUT NON MIAVERIT HABEAT ILLAS PROPITIAS* ('whoever does not place shit in this alleyway or does not shit or piss, let him have those favourable (fortunes?)'. The language here, as well as the fact that the inscription appeared with an image of Hecate, is clearly religious in origin.

³³ Cf. *CIL* 6. 13740, an admonition on a tomb: *qui hic mixerit aut cacarit, habeat deos superos et inferos iratos*, and Trimalchio's concern to protect his monument from defecation (Petronius, *Sat.* 71. 8).

³⁴ Boyce (1942) 13–22. Fröhlich (1991) contains an exhaustive catalogue and illustrations of the many appearances of snakes in Pompeian art, particularly when associated with house-shrines.



Figure 1.1. Pompeian wall fresco outside the Porta Vesuviana, with snakes, altar, and plaque forbidding defecation. Photograph by Michael Larvey.

*Iovem Optumu(m) Maximu(m) habeat iratos quisquis hic mixerit aut cacarit.*³⁵ There seems to be nothing particularly holy or even significant about the hallway in which the inscription was found; for most of the structure's history it seems to have been used to connect slave quarters,³⁶ and, in fact, the original excavator wanted to associate the sign with a possible latrine he discovered a few yards away.³⁷ The sign and its accompanying images, therefore, should be seen as an attempt to create a 'sacred' area, rather than as a reflection of a pre-existing sanctity. Indeed, this idea—that anywhere can be declared and marked as 'sacred', no matter how unworthy—lies behind a passage in Persius, in which the poet is criticized for writing satire by a fantasy interlocutor, and performatively throws in the towel:

³⁵ 'May he have twelve gods, and Diana, and Jupiter Optimus Maximus angry with him, whoever might piss or shit here': *CIL* 6. 29848b.

³⁶ Ball (2003) 34.

³⁷ de Romanis (1822) fig. p. 7, discussion pp. 38–9.

nil moror. euge omnes, omnes bene, mirae eritis res.
 hoc iuuat? 'hic' inquis 'veto quisquam faxit oletum.
 Pinge duos anguis. Pueri, sacer est locus, extra
 meiiite.' Discedo.

We're done. Hooray for everybody; everybody's great. You'll all be wondrous things.

Does that make you happy? 'Here' you say, 'I forbid anyone to defecate. Paint up two snakes. Boys, this place is sacred—piss Outside.' I'm out of here. (Persius, *Sat.* 1. 111–14)

As J. C. Bramble writes, 'the unpleasant imagery represents the satirist as an outsider, someone who refuses to abide by the usual laws of decency because those very laws are corrupt'.³⁸ But the point is that Persius recognizes, and expects his audience to recognize, the snakes as a potentially arbitrary marker of sanctity, declared and supported by a supposed community consensus but actually based on a single person's private authority.

Of course, this is simply Persius' view of the practice, but his description illustrates the fact that private individuals could and did take steps to mark their authority in the streets of the ancient city. Yet the evidence from Pompeii, which displays paintings like the one described by the poet but even more widely texts like *cacator cave malum*, shows that writing as well as images could be used to serve the same purpose. It is important to recognize, however, that this use of public writing does not qualify as 'incidental', despite the parallels which we might be tempted to draw with 'no littering' signs of the modern day. That is, as can be seen by the parallel with snakes-and-altar images with which they sometimes appear in Pompeii, the *cacator* signs draw at least some of their authority from their association with other, more formal written texts—an association which is made, at least in part, by the very fact that they are written. Whereas 'no littering' notices in the modern day exist in a world rife with incidental signage, Pompeii had no concomitant culture of informal authoritative public writing; the lettered words of the *cacator* signs connect not to other street signs as they would in the present, but with formal inscriptions, such as the dedicatory inscriptions underneath statues or the laws published on wooden or bronze tablets in the Forum. The association with formal inscriptions was also assisted by

³⁸ Bramble (1974) 134.

the content of the notices—the admonition against soiling the area—which would have been familiar from inscriptions like the praetor's edict cited earlier. Like the graffito which was added to the stone containing that edict, however, the *cacator* signs too distinguish themselves from formal, public texts by the use of direct address, which underscores the immediacy and directness already present in the graffiti form.³⁹

The connection between what we might call admonitory signs in Pompeii and more formal epigraphic practices is further underscored by a curious circumstance: in two instances, signs of this nature incorporate metrical lines into their texts. Thus, for example, one notice painted on a wall in Regio 5 warns *stercorari ad murum progredere* ('dung-bearer, go to the city wall')⁴⁰ but also adds a hexameter which runs *si pre<n>sus fueris poena<m> patiare neces<s>e est* ('if you will have been taken [after committing the crime] it is necessary that you suffer punishment': *CIL* 4. 7038). It concludes with a final *cave* ('beware!') to cap off its warning. Similarly, on a stretch of wall between 7. 11. 12 and 13, above one of the painted images of snakes and an altar, is written *otiosis locus hic non est; discede, morator!* ('this is not a place for leisure; go away, lingerer!': *CIL* 4. 813)—again, a hexameter, although it is necessary (incorrectly) to scan the second 'o' in the first word as short in order to make the meter work.⁴¹ In a certain sense, the appearance here of the hexameter is not surprising: not only was it the standard epic meter, which those who attended school would have learned through the mechanism of Virgil's *Aeneid* (on which see Chapter 5), but, more importantly, it had long ago been adopted from Greek

³⁹ Although Pompeii does not contain any formal civic prohibitions against dumping, one was preserved at Herculaneum in which the Aedile M. Alficius Paulus sought to protect the water supply from being fouled (*CIL* 4. 10488). The 'official' nature of the text is evident not just in the fact that Paulus asserts his authority as an aedile at the beginning—and outlines the punishments for offenders at the end—but in the fact that, like the praetor Sentius, he uses the *si quis velit* formula.

⁴⁰ It is also possible that *stercorari* is meant to be the infinitive: 'Go to the city wall to defecate'.

⁴¹ This is the only sign of its kind in Pompeii—unlike the multiple *cacator* inscriptions—and it is difficult to say exactly why it appeared here, although, as James Franklin has noted, it seems likely that this stretch of street between the entrance to Pompeii's main brothel and that of the Stabian Baths was a place where people congregated, mingled, and potentially engaged in socially unacceptable behaviour: Franklin (1986) 319–28, at 321. For an image of the snakes and the altar (the inscription has been removed), see Figure 1.2.



Figure 1.2. Pompeian wall fresco, located on street between 7. 11. 12 and 13, showing snakes and altar. Photograph by Michael Larvey.

literary and inscriptive traditions to become the first half of the epigrammatic couplet, the standard form for funerary texts and other kinds of ‘popular’ inscribed verse. Given this, it is certainly possible that the two lines—*si prensus fueris* and *otiosis*—are quotations or tags from poems which circulated orally in the ancient city. But even if this is true, they were clearly texts which at least made use of the traditional fantasy that such poems had a material dimension. If, conversely, the lines were actually composed in order to function as textual place markers—that is, in order to be written on a wall—they must on some level allude to the tradition of epigram, the notional materiality of that genre, and the sense of literariness which it brought to inscribed forms.

It is worth noting and emphasizing, however, that the epigrammatic tradition was one which was exclusively explored and exploited in private inscriptions. These might be dedicatory, commemorative, or even playful, but the point is that the language of actual civic authority was that of prose. The Roman state did not produce poetry. There were certainly formulae which the writers of the *stercorari* and *otiosis* signs could have drawn from the world of public decrees, laws, edicts, and prohibitions which they could have employed to express their messages, but instead they chose a form which by its nature linked the sign to texts produced by private individuals. Like the *cacator* signs, moreover, both of these notices directly address the

reader instead of adopting the impersonal tone of formal edicts. In modern terms, these gestures might seem counter-intuitive, in the sense that today we assume that one way to ensure compliance is to invoke (explicitly or implicitly) the power of the state. As I have argued, however, the writing regime of the ancient street was by no means owned by the civic authorities; indeed, a case can be made that the private inscriptive voice made more sense and had more sway in contexts like this, which sought to draw on a sense of the local and personal to persuade the reader to obey. The poetic form of this text, then, is part of its attempt to embed itself in a particular inscriptive and literary tradition which held its own kind of authority in the ancient urban environment.

BETWEEN EPITAPH AND EPIGRAM

In both of the instances just cited, therefore, I would argue that public signs make reference to the literary and material history of the epigram as a way of invoking a kind of authority not derived from civic governance. At the same time, however, the precise relationship between Roman public writing and the literary tradition is not at all clear. In part, this is because the Latin epigram itself is a wily beast, a kind of catch-all generic category whose definition, never clear, also changes over time. It is apparent that, after Martial claimed the term strongly for his own work, it never again floated quite as freely as it had; certainly in the modern day it has come to be closely associated with what he made it, the short, witty form ‘with a sting in the tail’.⁴² By the time of Catullus, however, (and certainly thereafter) Latin literary epigram had become widely separated from its original inscriptive contexts, under the influence of Hellenistic formulations of the genre. Kathryn Gutzwiller offers a succinct description of the process by which epigram (not originally a term which described a genre⁴³) moved from anonymous inscription to ‘authored’ literary form over the course of the fourth and third centuries BCE: because of

⁴² For a succinct and insightful discussion of Martial’s legacy, see Sullivan (1991) 253–312.

⁴³ Indeed, the argument has been made that the term was not made genuinely ‘generic’ in Latin until Martial: Puelma (1996) 123–39.

a growing general interest in the identities and work of famous authors, inscribed texts began to be collected and (sometimes spuriously) attributed to specific individuals; the stylistic or thematic commonalities which lead to the attributions in the first place were understood as manifestations of a literary persona, allowing and encouraging new texts to be composed 'in the style of *x*'; contemporary Hellenistic poets thus began to see epigram as a vehicle by which they might explore their own poetic self-representation, and to compose their own collections.⁴⁴ Certainly, poets continued to make reference to and exploit the genre's origins in inscriptive forms, but they clearly did so in the understanding that the reader would recognize the conceit *as* a conceit. Anyte of Tegea even wrote (pseudo-)epitaphs for insects, a witty means of subverting the serious goals and tone of earlier tomb inscriptions, both real and fictitious.⁴⁵

In the Latin-speaking world too, epigram begins with inscriptions, most notably represented in the epitaphs of the tomb of the Scipios. Here the oldest four are in the distinctively Roman Saturnian meter, but the latest gives way to elegiac couplets, the standard meter of Greek dedicatory and sepulchral texts. This is presumably due to the influence of Ennius, who famously introduced the hexameter to Latin literature and is also the author of epigrams, three on the life of Scipio Africanus, one on the poet's own portrait, and one for his tomb. These texts are squarely in 'monumental' mode, evident not just in their self-representation as epitaphs, but in their evocation of grand, nationalistic, and transcendent themes.⁴⁶ In similar style are the epitaphs of Naevius and Plautus, preserved in Aulus Gellius (*NA* 1. 24), although these may or may not be genuine. As in Hellenistic literary circles, sepulchral epigrams were often written for poets by later biographers, a custom which also gave us Virgil's elegiac epitaph (cited in Aelius Donatus' *vita*).⁴⁷ Thus, in the same way that the fantasy of inscription remained active in Hellenistic literature—even as both writer and reader recognized it as a fantasy—so too it did in the Latin epigrammatic tradition. Indeed, works like Varro's *Imagines* and a similar one by T. Pomponius Atticus seem to have been both influenced by and influential on the inscriptive tradition. The texts

⁴⁴ Gutzwiller (1998) 47–53.

⁴⁵ Gutzwiller (1998) 54–68.

⁴⁶ M. Citroni (1998) 171–89, at 174.

⁴⁷ Cf. Homer's epitaph, in Latin (!), also quoted by Gellius from Varro's *Imagines* (*NA* 3. 11).

featured pictures of famous men, along with (sometimes) poetic *elogia* which evoked dedicatory inscriptions; these, in turn, have been credited as part of the inspiration for the texts which appeared with the statues of *summi viri* which decorated Augustus' forum.⁴⁸

Given this background, it is curious to note that Catullus seems deliberately to have eschewed specific references to inscribed forms, even in poems which might well have used them. This is particularly noticeable in his famous poem on his brother's death (101), which seems deliberately to refuse categorization as a simple written epitaph, although scholars are divided on whether the text *could* have been inscribed or not. There is an old tradition that it was written to be included on a cenotaph, and it certainly plays with the traditional language and themes of funerary commemoration.⁴⁹ At the same time, it does not include many of the standard tropes used by epitaphs real and fictitious to identify themselves as such: it does not address the reader; it does not refer to itself as a physical document; it does not name the deceased, or, in fact, tell us anything at all about him except the fact that he was Catullus' brother.⁵⁰ This last omission seems especially egregious, given the fact that part of the point of the inscription on a tomb was to identify and commemorate the dead inhabitant. Catullus' poem, by contrast, dwells on the experience and activities of the (still living) poet, emphasized by the present-tense verb in line 1 (*advenio*), the verb of speaking (*alloquerer*) in line 4, the 'spontaneous' exclamation (*heu!*) in line 6, as well as *nunc* ('now') in line 7. Andrew Feldherr suggests that this ambiguity is deliberate, that Catullus here is playing with ideas of presence and absence, and reflecting issues of commemoration and community which literary and epigraphic texts have in common.⁵¹ The fact remains, however, that Catullus 101 is as much if not more about the poet's self-representation as about the representation of his dead brother.

⁴⁸ Geiger (2008) 34–48. The *elogia* in the Forum Augustum were not, of course, poetic, and indeed it is not certain that all of Varro's *Imagines* were accompanied by verse (although some of them clearly were: see n. 47). Cornelius Nepos' biography of Atticus, however, makes it clear that his book included 'not more than four or five lines of poetry' to go with each image (*non amplius quaternis quinisque versibus: Vit. Att. 18. 5*).

⁴⁹ Ellis (1889) 480. More recently, see (e.g.) Gaisser (2009) 118: '[poem 101] is presented as something that might be inscribed on stone'.

⁵⁰ Gelzer (1992) 26–32.

⁵¹ Feldherr (2000) 209–31.

This should probably not surprise us, as Catullus is generally interested in the subjective, intimate, and personal.⁵² In a similar vein, we might compare poem 4, on the dedication of a ship to Castor and Pollux. The poem clearly is in the tradition of the 'speaking object' epigrams familiar from (real and fictitious) dedications from the Hellenistic world. Yet although Catullus has the ship speak, it does so through the intermediary of a narrator, who interprets the experience of the ship for the reader/listener. This too serves to call attention to the role of the poet rather than just the material object for which the poem was written.⁵³ Again, Catullus' innovations in this area are fully consistent with his interest in bringing Hellenistic forms and ideas to Latin verse,⁵⁴ but point to the fact that—here, at least—he is closer in technique to the Augustan elegists than to Martial, another heir and imitator. Martial's oeuvre is replete with texts which perform themselves as inscriptions, on stone or other materials, although he, like Catullus, is also clearly aware of and happy to play with the traditions of the genre.⁵⁵ Indeed, one way of reading the *Xenia* and the *Apophoreta* is as an extended joke on the phenomenon of collapsing epigram with object.⁵⁶ The elegists, on the other hand, only offer inscriptions embedded in longer texts, at least in part because of their interest in characterization, both of individuals within their poetry and of their own authorial personae. As Teresa Ramsby remarks, 'the elegiac poets have purposely moved from the incorporation of epigrammatic themes within their poetry to the construction of a Roman world where characters (and authors) apply their energies eagerly to the act of self-commemoration'.⁵⁷

Over the years, and especially recently, there has been considerable interest in the representation of inscriptions in Latin literature and,

⁵² On which in poem 101, see Citroni (1979) 43–100.

⁵³ Copley (1958) 9–13.

⁵⁴ On which, Paratore (1963) 562–87.

⁵⁵ On those epigrams which perform themselves as sepulchral inscriptions, see Henriksén (2006) 349–67. Cf. Fitzgerald (2007) 26, who notes Martial's exploitation of the 'inscriptional associations' of epigram.

⁵⁶ W. R. Johnson (2005) 139–50.

⁵⁷ Ramsby (2007) 21. For a more deconstructive view of the investment of Ovid, in particular, in the language of funerary inscription, see Hardie (2002) 62–105. Hardie suggests that 'the memorialisation of the dead through funerary inscription, and the attempt to abolish the boundary between the living and the dead, [may be seen] as a general paradigm for writing and reading' (84).

correspondingly, the influence of literature on inscriptions.⁵⁸ Much of this scholarship has focused on funerary texts, where there does seem to be significant, if not always easy to define, overlap between the different media. But whether this has to do with direct influence or the fact that both sets of texts happen to preserve some of the same formulae and topoi is not clear.⁵⁹ Moreover, A. F. Morelli has made the provocative point that the influence of Martial—the master of the Latin epigram—on Latin epigraphic texts is minimal until late antiquity. He attributes this to the different goals and interests of Martial’s epigram and epitaph: the first focused on entertainment, wit, and rhetorical sophistication; the second, on the important and serious work of memorializing the dead.⁶⁰ He writes, ‘The literary epigram is perceived as a genre divorced from epitaph, which fashions its rules according to its purely eulogistic aims . . . Epigraphic poetry continued its tendency to imitate not epigrammatic authors, but those most prominent in “higher” poetic genres’ (2005: 167). In other words, in the Latin tradition, despite certain formal similarities, there is a real and important divide between literary epigram and the most visible and easily accessible form of poetic inscription in the Roman landscape, namely funerary texts. Of course, ancient graffiti were not striving after the same ‘eulogistic aims’ which framed epitaphs. Indeed, in general their goals seem more akin to the ‘literary’ ones which Martial pursued: entertainment, sophistication, humour. At the same time, however, it cannot be forgotten that graffiti *are* epigraphic texts and reflect (both consciously and unconsciously) other inscriptions with which they shared the ancient Roman landscape.

One important example of this is *CIL* 4. 8899, a poem which was written in ink on a short stretch of wall between 3. 5. 3 and 4 (see Figure 1.3 for a line drawing). The text was approximately 22.5 cm long and 9 cm high.

Hospes, adhuc tumuli ni meias, ossa prec[antur]
 Nam, si vis <h>uic gratior esse, caca.
 Urticae monumenta vides, discede, cacator.
 Non est hic tutum culu<m> aperire tibi.

⁵⁸ Inscriptions in literature: Stein (1931); Barchiesi (1979) 3–11; Dinter (2005) 153–69; Ramsby (2007); Erasmo (2008) esp. 181–204. Literature in inscriptions: Purdie (1935); Courtney (1995); Lissberger (1934); Lattimore (1962); Wolff (2000); Cugusi (1996) esp. 165–98.

⁵⁹ Yardley (1996) 267–73.

⁶⁰ Morelli (2005) 151–75.

Guest, do not urinate against this tomb, the bones beg you,
 for, if you wish to be more pleasing to this man, shit.
 You look upon the monuments of Urtica ['Nettle']; go away, shitter.
 It is not safe for you to open your ass here.

It has long been recognized that this is a joke, which plays off a presumably well-known tag used in epitaphs. The first line (*Hospes . . . precantur*) is found in combination with a different pentameter in a genuine funerary inscription in marble from Rome, made by a father to honour his wife and son (*CIL* 6. 2357). It has also been observed that, in the graffito, the name Urtica is part of the humour, as the nettle would pose a danger to the one who squats to defecate in the open;⁶¹ there might be a threat of anal rape hiding behind the final pentameter.⁶²

In addition, the first lines of the inscription also contain a joke, which turns on the traditional prohibition against excretion in the area of a tomb: the couplet initially requests that the visitor not piss—because, as the second line informs us, the inhabitant would instead prefer that the guest shit here. Scholars have been somewhat puzzled by this, some wanting to change the first word in line 2 from *nam* to *nec* in order to make the pentameter echo the prohibition of line 1. But this surely misses the point of the joke, where, as is often true in literary epigram, the pentameter wittily undermines the serious sentiment of the hexameter. This is made even more humorous if we note that only a few doors away, at the corner of the *insula*,

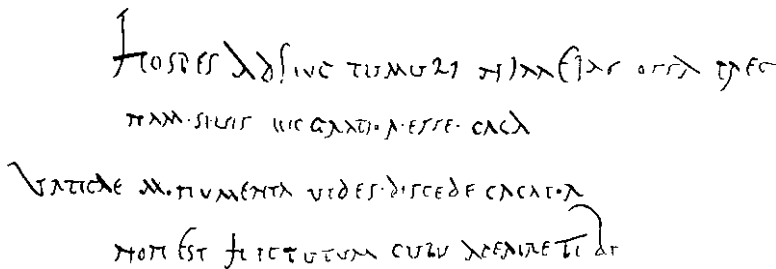


Figure 1.3. Line drawing of *CIL* 4. 8899, from *CIL* vol. 4, suppl. 3, pt. 2.

⁶¹ As was suggested in Della Corte's original publication of the text in *CIL*, elaborated in Lebek (1976) 287–92.

⁶² Koenen (1978) 85–6.

were located no less than three of the *cacator, cave malum* signs (CIL 4. 7714–16). CIL 4. 8899 may then be playing off its more serious neighbours: don't shit *there*, shit *here*. This is perhaps undermined by the admonition 'go away, shitter' in line 3, and indeed, the second pair of lines in the texts seems discontinuous in sense with the first: having asked the visitor to shit, the text then bids him to go away and threatens consequences if he does what was earlier requested. But, again, at least part of what is being expressed here is a joke, which turns not just on the name *Urtica* but on the phrase *discede cacator*, which echoes the more serious admonition *discede morator*, discussed earlier, prominently painted on a wall not too far away. Thus, although scholars such as Edward Courtney⁶³ see this second pair of lines as a separate text awkwardly appended to the first, both couplets can be seen to employ the same central joke concerning excretion and commemoration, as 'serious' admonitions which seek to establish the sanctity of certain places are transformed into casual graffiti.

In fact, the cleverest part of the text may be the inclusion of the word *monumenta* in line 3. The nature and role of the 'monument' in Roman culture has been the subject of much scholarly interest. From Livy's *incorrupta rerum gestarum monumenta* (AUC pref. 6) to Horace's *monumentum aere perennius* (Odes 3. 30. 1), it is clear that Roman literary texts had a strong sense of the 'monument' as something stable, significant, and lasting.⁶⁴ Correspondingly, by the first century CE, monuments held an important place in imperial culture, as symbols of power, statements about memory and history, and attempts to adopt and maintain a literal place in the Roman social landscape.⁶⁵ As is frequently noted, monuments in Rome made use not just of written text but also images, so that there would have been a complicated interplay between what was viewed and what was read;⁶⁶ this was clearly also true in the Pompeian street, where pictures and texts constantly vied for the attention of the passer-by.⁶⁷ Especially in the context of funerary monuments, however, it is often noted that words can provide a particularity which images cannot, as they are able to provide a name for the deceased as well as details about his life which the viewer would

⁶³ Courtney (1995) 368–9.

⁶⁴ Wiseman (1986) 87–100; Cooley (2000a) 7–20.

⁶⁵ For an excellent recent discussion, see E. Thomas (2007) 168–70.

⁶⁶ As argued in Newby (2007) 1–16. Cf. Corbier (2006a) 13–17.

⁶⁷ Kellum (1999) 283–99.

not have been able to glean from the accompanying image alone. In this sense, epitaphs on burial markers hold a particularly important place in the privatization and popularization of the written word in mapping the Roman city. Through funerary inscriptions, and their place on and as *monumenta*, individuals of even marginal means could not only stake a physical claim on the landscape, but notionally guarantee their place in the collective memory of their communities.

Of course, *CIL* 8899 was not actually part of a ‘monument’ as it pretends to be. It was found on the side of a building along Pompeii’s busy Via dell’Abbondanza, written with a pen in black ink on a short stretch of wall between the entrance to a shop and that to a house.⁶⁸ Part of the humour of the poem, therefore, is in the incongruity between its content and its context, not just the reuse of a serious text in an informal setting, but in the redeployment of a form associated with permanence and stability in a medium far more ephemeral. On the other hand, it is worth noting that, although in English a monument is more frequently understood as a building or structure, *monumentum* in Latin was closely associated with writing, insofar as words could be useful in recording and remembering individuals and events of the past. Thus, Varro acknowledges that the term *monumentum* originated with tombs—because they admonish (*admoneant*) the viewer to remember mortality—but goes on to note *cetera quae scripta ac facta memoriae causa monimenta dicta* (‘everything else written or made for the sake of memory is called a monument’: *LL* 6. 45). Although a tomb or a structure could be a monument, so could a text, as long as its purpose was to remind the reader of a person and his deeds. In this sense, then, a case might be made that when *CIL* 8899 announces to the viewer, ‘you look upon the monuments of Urtica’, it is speaking the truth: the poem actually is a monument, which reminds the visitor to think about the probably fictitious Urtica. Moreover, insofar as that name is revealed in the text’s final line to be a part of the humour, it is also asking the viewer to consider and participate in the joke—perhaps in itself a deed worthy of commemoration and one which was performed in the very writing of the poem.

⁶⁸ Unfortunately, our ability to identify exactly what function was served by the spaces beyond any of these entrances is limited, since they have never been excavated. But the wide expanse of the doorway at 3. 5. 3, leading directly into an open space beyond, certainly suggests a place of business, and contrasts with the narrow opening and small section of *fauces* preserved at 3. 5. 4, characteristic of entryways to elite Pompeian homes.

The inclusion of the name ‘Urtica’ in *CIL* 8899 also underscores the central irony of the graffito’s reference and connection to funerary epigram, namely that the point of a grave monument is to celebrate and render as permanent as possible the name and identity of the deceased. Graffiti generally, and in particular poetic graffiti, have a far more ambivalent relationship to those described or ‘commemorated’ in their lines. As here, the texts are often anonymous, and even when they do provide a name, it is unclear whether it is a pseudonym, a nickname, or something else altogether. This will be discussed more in Chapter 3, when I turn to the nature of graffiti authorship. For the moment, however, let it suffice to note that, by quoting and parodying a funerary text, 8899 plays with the relationship between these two types of epigram and suggests a similarity between them: both are representations of private individuals, both created and fixed in place in order to stake a claim on the viewer’s attention and memory. On the other hand, it is clear that—as in the modern West—the difference between the two in antiquity was also profound, both in medium and in message: one the product of a moment, an idle, joking amusement; the other, a serious, laborious, and heartfelt expression of commemoration. Moreover, if at least the overt focus of a funerary text is on the honoree—the one whose life and death are described in its lines—the focus of the graffito is on the (albeit anonymous) author, the one about whose motivations, sense of humour, and identity we are forced to wonder. Both the differences and the similarities between these two types of inscription would have been especially visible in the ancient world because graffiti seem to have proliferated in cemeteries. It is true that we have evidence that some people tried to protect their tombs from written defacement: *CIL* 6. 29942 opens, *inscriptor rogo te ut transeas hoc monumentum* (‘writer, I ask that you pass this monument by’); similarly, the beginning words of *CIL* 6. 29943 are lost, but it concludes *valias ut tu hoc monumento ni quit inscribas* (‘may you be well should you not write anything on this tomb’).⁶⁹ That such admonitions were necessary may be seen in the wide range of graffiti found in Pompeii’s ‘streets of tombs.’⁷⁰ Such extensive unauthorized textual creation

⁶⁹ On which, see Carroll (2006) 82–3.

⁷⁰ Best recorded are those from the road just beyond the Nuceria Gate, collected by Della Corte, which range from elaborate depictions of gladiators fighting, along with spectators and musicians (*CIL* 4. 10237), to cheerful salutations (‘Habitus gives a friendly greeting to Secundus and his circle’: *CIL* 4. 10247), to a quotation of a popular verse, dedicated to a locally famous prostitute (*CIL* 4. 10241).

alongside the more formal funerary inscriptions suggests that the boundary between the different written regimes was perhaps more porous than in the modern day, and that attempts to 'read' the experience of Roman cemeteries are not complete without consideration of graffiti texts.⁷¹

CIL 4. 8899 (*hospes aduc tumuli ni meias*) therefore represents a humorous melding of three different but curiously connected types of writing in the ancient city: funerary epitaph, graffiti epigram, and signage which redeploys the language of sacred spaces such as burial sites to call attention to certain 'sacred' places in the city. It has clear echoes of, and associations with, other epigraphic texts, yet at the same time also displays a certain 'literary' sensibility: its meter is neatly, if not beautifully, constructed, including the requisite trisyllabic line endings for the hexameters and disyllabic for the pentameters; it carefully and cleverly postpones the shocking command *caca* to the end of line 2, which sets up the surprise with an otherwise polite and elevated tone; most notably, as already discussed, it plays on the word *monumenta* as a term which has resonance in both literary and material worlds. Although it is clearly true, as scholars have noted, that there are separate traditions of the epigram as inscription and as literary form,⁷² texts such as 8899 show the ways in which those traditions met and intermingled in ancient urban graffiti.

A similar effect may be seen in another text which was found not far from *CIL* 4. 8899, *CIL* 4. 9123, inscribed to the left of the doorway to the shop at 9. 13. 4. Unfortunately, the inscription was destroyed shortly after it was discovered, so that Della Corte's line drawing is the only evidence which remains (see Figure 1.4). The text was approximately 15 cm long and 6 cm high.

Nihil durare potest tempore perpetuo;
 Cum bene sol nituit, redditur oceano;
 Decrescit Phoebe, quae modo plena fuit.
 Ventorum feritas saepe fit aura l[e]vis.

Nothing is able to endure forever;
 Once the sun has shone brightly, it returns to the ocean;
 The moon grows smaller, who just now was full;
 The savagery of winds often becomes a light breeze.

⁷¹ Such as that of Koortbojian (1996) 210–34.

⁷² Ramsby (2007) 28–9.

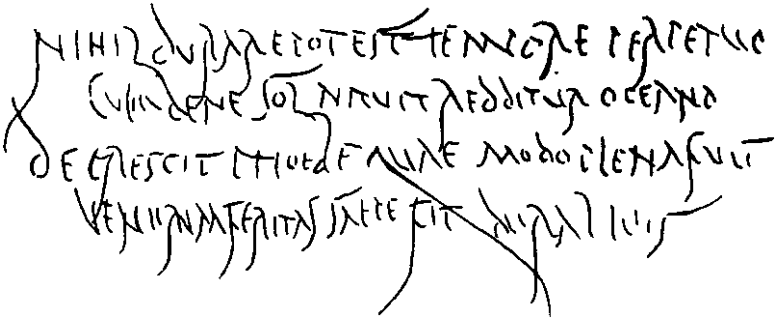


Figure 1.4. Line drawing of *CIL* 4. 9123, from *CIL* vol. 4, suppl. 3, pt. 2.

Curiously, the poem seems to consist of four pentameters, although the beginning of the first line is somewhat garbled. This is a bastardization of the elegiac couplet seen nowhere else in ancient literature, even though, according to the line drawing made by Della Corte, the second and fourth lines were indented as though the text were genuinely composed of two couplets. The ‘elegiac’ theme of the poem is, however, clear, so much so that it has been fancifully seen as a lament for the entire lost city of Pompeii.⁷³ In Della Corte’s original transcription,⁷⁴ the final line is rendered as *Venerum feritas saepe fit dura levis* (‘the harsh savagery of love often becomes light’), leading some scholars to see the poem as erotic in theme.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, this reading is sustainable on neither metrical nor palaeographic grounds, and was emended by no less a personage than A. E. Housman to the wording as I have quoted it.⁷⁶

The impulse to read the text as erotic is understandable, given the general interest of graffiti poetry in love and the genres of love poetry. In fact, the writer may well have intended it to be seen as a lament over amatory loss. At the same time, however, it is important to note the poem’s structural peculiarities. As I said, although it seems to have been presented visually as two couplets, formally it represents the

⁷³ Magaldi (1930) 17–18.

⁷⁴ Della Corte (1924) 41.

⁷⁵ Funari (1991) 67–8; Varone (2002) 109–10 implies an erotic reading by appending the poem to his discussion of Tiburtinus; Della Corte (1958) 32.

⁷⁶ Housman (1927) 60–1. Todd (1939) 168–70 adds that Della Corte’s own line drawing indicates that *ventorum* rather than *Venerum* is the correct reading, as the writer used an upper case ‘e’ throughout the text. Thus, the double line which Della Corte read as a lower case ‘e’ is more likely to be the damaged bottom of a ‘t’ and left side of an ‘o’.

later halves of four separate distichs, an impression which is reinforced by the fact that each line is independent in both grammar and sense. Indeed, F. A. Todd considers that, were it not for the indentations of the second and fourth lines, ‘one might have guessed that it was a school exercise in verse composition, in the form of a “theme and variations”⁷⁷—although he does not hazard a guess as to why the supposed schoolchild should have confined itself to composing only the pentameter halves of the couplets. It is true, though, that each pair of lines (1/2 and 3/4) are metrically very similar, and differ only slightly in word division. This certainly suggests that their author (who may or may not have been their inscriber) was working from some kind of standard pattern. As with many graffiti texts, we cannot state for certain where the verses originated or how they were intended to be read. I would point out, though, that unlike the vast majority of other, more clearly erotic, poems from Pompeian walls, the tone of 9123 is curiously dispassionate; the lines are detached and sententious rather than personal and subjective. In sum, they might well have done as practice texts for a school exercise—but, similarly and perhaps more appropriately given their theme, they might also have served as stock elements for funerary texts, laments for the changeability of fortune and the passage from life into death.⁷⁸ The structure of the text, its tone, and its theme all point not so much to standard ‘literary’ models of epigram or elegy, but to other, more prosaic forms and contexts.

In this sense, as much as it may seem to be ‘infected . . . with the grace of poetry’,⁷⁹ the literariness of *CIL* 4. 9123 is questionable—or, one might say, it presents itself as a question. If Della Corte is to be believed and the lines were written as though they were two couplets, their writer clearly wished them to be seen as a complete poem. But a closer examination reveals the ways in which they diverge from that goal: no self-respecting author of canonical epigram or elegy would present simply the latter half of the distich floating alone like the punchline to an untold joke. As Ovid famously remarked, *sex mihi surgat opus numeris, in quinque residat* (‘let my work rise up in six feet, settle back in five’: *Amores* 1. 1. 27), carefully demarking the

⁷⁷ Todd (1939) 169.

⁷⁸ On the motif of death as the passage from light into darkness, see Lattimore (1962) 161–4; on the use of manuals in composing epitaphs, see Carroll (2006) 106–8.

⁷⁹ Varone (2002) 109.

elegiac couplet from the continuous martial drum of epic hexameter.⁸⁰ But although this distinction was continuously made, no author ever delineated or defined the continuous pentameter, presumably because it was felt to have little meaning on its own.⁸¹ If, however, we trust Ovid's account of the relationship between the 'rise' of the hexameter and the 'fall' of the pentameter, there is a curious and (I would argue) not coincidental correlation between *CIL* 4. 9123's form and its theme: the poem's mournful emphasis on transformation and completion is reflected in its repeated use of the 'descending' closure of the couplet. Such radical metrical experimentation is not found in the canonical poets, but it has been pointed out that epigraphic texts are far looser in their adherence to standard generic metrical patterns (on which, see Chapter 4).⁸² Thus, 9123's use of the unadorned pentameter would seem to emerge from the epigraphic tradition, even as the poem's manipulation of the metrical form as part of its meaning seems to point towards a literary sensibility.

Perhaps one of the most important differences, however, between an epigram as a purely literary exercise and as a genuine inscription is the latter's role as a material object. As I have noted, one of the things which may have led Catullus and the Roman elegists away from composing poems which strictly mimic the form of inscribed texts was their interest in exploring their own poetic personae, something against which the 'objective' tone of (e.g.) epitaphs would seem to work. Thus, similarly, in the two graffiti poems just discussed the stress is not on the notional speaker or author of the verses, but on the form and function of the texts themselves. One way in which this is particularly emphasized in the case of *hospes adhuc tumuli* (*CIL* 4. 8899) is in its direct address to the reader, which gives the poem a kind of living presence which engages the passer-by. The phenomenon of the speaking inscription is, in fact, common in genuine sepulchral epigrams, a trope whose origins in Greek inscriptive practices has been linked to the desire to make a connection between the dead person and the (still living) reader. This connection is created not just by the illusion that the dead person, or his/her monument, is speaking directly to the visitor, but by the fact that many readers

⁸⁰ Cf. Ovid, *Tristia* 3. 1. 11; Pliny, *Epist.* 5. 17. 2 may express the same idea.

⁸¹ For a discussion of the potentially subversive use of the isolated pentameter, see Morgan (2010) 363.

⁸² The point is made by Goold (1998) 16–29, at 25.

would have read the text aloud, transforming themselves into mouth-pieces for the deceased.⁸³ Thus, a standard formula in Roman epitaphs is *dic rogo qui transis: sit tibi terra levis* ('I ask that you who go by say: "let the earth be light upon you"': *CIL* 2. 5241);⁸⁴ more elaborately, *CLE* 1278 proclaims, *quodque meam retinet vocem data littera saxo | voce tua vivet, quisque lege[s titu]los* ('and since the writing entrusted to the stone preserves my voice, | it will live by your voice, whoever will read the record of honours': l. 5–6).⁸⁵ This construction of the living as tools of the dead is reinforced when the epitaph requests that the visitor performs certain activities: read, weep, report, or (in the joke of *CIL* 4. 8899) shit. In this context, the popular form of address in epitaphs *hospes*, which can mean either host or guest, is suitable: the reader is simultaneously the one who receives the benefit of the text (its 'guest') and the one responsible for taking responsibility for its passage into the living world (its 'host').

It has been pointed out, though, that even at the same time that funerary inscriptions point towards and make use of individual, momentary encounters with a reader/speaker, they also represent permanence and stability. As Andrew Feldherr (2000) writes, '[I]n the case of inscriptions, while each individual reading is a single diachronic event moving irreversibly from "hello" to "good-bye", the text itself is infinitely re-readable. There is always a new viator to offer his voice to the dead; indeed the same reader can repeat the experience himself' (220). Feldherr, and others,⁸⁶ see this as an important aspect of the funerary text, insofar as it is the mechanism by which the dead person is able to maintain his/her presence in the world of the living. It is worth noting, however, that graffiti too recognize and use their dual role as 'living' voices and fixed, enduring inscriptions. One important example of this is an inscribed text discovered outside the so-called House of Balbus⁸⁷ and described

⁸³ As Jasper Svenbro writes, 'at the moment of reading, the reading voice does not belong to the reader . . . If he lends his voice to these mute signs, the text appropriates it': (1993) 46. Day (1989) 16–28, esp. 26–8; on the trope in Roman epitaphs, see Feldherr (2000) 218–19.

⁸⁴ Cf. *CIL* 2. 415, 558, 1752, 3186, 5975; 6. 12951; 8. 9496.

⁸⁵ Feldherr (2000) 218 n. 34 also cites *CIL* 11. 627 (= *CLE* 513) and *CIL* 14.356 (= *CLE* 1450), which may be a genuine version of the inscription cited in Possidius' *Life of St Augustine* 31. If so, it expresses a similar idea.

⁸⁶ Häusle (1980) 61–3.

⁸⁷ It is worth noting that, although *CIL* identifies the findspot simply as 'near the door to the house of Balbus', the excavation daybooks from 1866 indicate clearly that

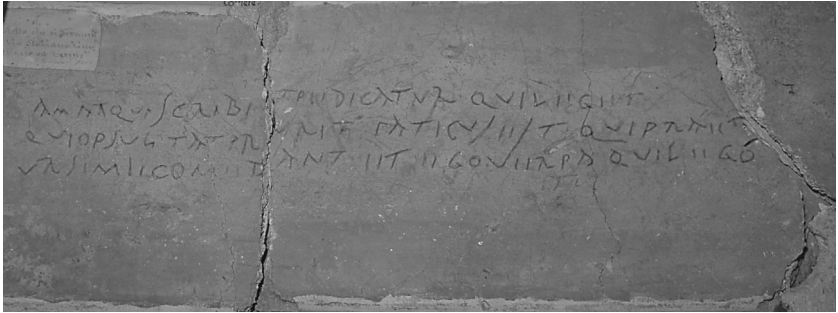


Figure 1.5. Fragment of plaster showing *CIL* 4. 2360, Museo Archaeological Nazionale di Napoli. Photograph by author, enhanced by Sam Woolley.

when it was uncovered in the nineteenth century as having been written in *litteris magnis optime conservatis*.⁸⁸ Since it was removed from the site shortly thereafter, we are still able to admire those well-formed letters in the storerooms of the Naples Archaeological Museum (see Figure 1.5 for a photograph). The text is approximately 25 cm long and 13 cm high.

Amat qui scribet, pedicatur qui leget,
 qui opsultat prurit, paticus est qui praeterit.
 Ursi me comedant; et ego verpa qui lego.

He loves, the one who will write; the one who will read is fucked.
 The critic wants it bad. Who passes by? He sucks.
 Bears eat me! I'm the reader and a dickhead too.

The meter is iambic senarii, a comic meter whose flexibility and easy staccato rhythm is seen as reflecting the pattern of conversation.⁸⁹ Thematically, however, the poem reminds one of the famous passage from Persius 1 in which a reading is described as a sexual encounter between poet and audience: ‘the poems enter into their loins and their

the door in question was 9. 2. 15, a rear entrance which led to the service rooms (kitchen, latrine, pantry) and a stair to the second floor. Although the House of Balbus, whose front entrance was 9. 2. 16, had a portico which originally opened towards doorway 15, by the time of the eruption this had been enclosed and reoriented towards the more ornate parts of the house so that only a narrow door connected the service areas and the rest of the living space. It seems possible that this was done in order to make the upper floors of the house into separate dwellings, meaning that we should connect *CIL* 4. 2360 with these apartments rather than the doorway to the floridly decorated House of Balbus.

⁸⁸ *CIL* 4. 2360.

⁸⁹ Erasmo (2008) 162.

inner parts are tickled by the quivering verses' (20–1). Here, similarly, the poet is a lover in the most graphic terms, and others are assigned sexual roles which reflect their relationship to the poem: the one who reads it is penetrated by it, the one who criticizes clearly desires it (literally 'itches' for it), even the person who simply walks by it is made into the 'passive' recipient of its 'love'. The last line contains the punchline, as the reader discovers—the point of *ursi me comedant* seems to be to express surprise—that he too has been caught up in the sexual economy of the poem. Especially if, as seems to have been common in antiquity, the text was read aloud, the joke is on the reader, as he announces to the world *ego verpa qui lego*.⁹⁰

As I noted, the metatextual joke that animates the poem exists also in canonical poetry, but it is important to note that the parallel from Persius is a passage in which the poet describes a recitation—that is, a moment in which the author animates his text with his voice and thus transforms it into a face-to-face social experience. Of course, even the isolated encounter between a solo reader and a poetry book establishes a kind of relationship between poet and audience, but by highlighting the voice and the living bodies which produce and receive its sound, Persius foregrounds the corporeal and (therefore) erotic. In a somewhat different vein, Jasper Svenbro has argued that from the earliest Greek inscriptions, the way in which a text takes possession of the voice of the reader is figured as a sexual act. He compares the 'passivity' of the one whose speech is used by an inscription to the role of the *eromenos* in pederasty, pointing to a text on a kylix from 500–480 BCE which announces 'the writer of this inscription will bugger the reader'.⁹¹ Svenbro goes on to suggest that the mistrust of writing which can be identified in the Socrates of Plato's dialogues has to do with this sexualized relationship, and the philosopher's concern with what can and does happen to the writer's words after they have left his control.⁹² In this sense, although the problem is present in the case of all written words, it is particularly acute in the case of public inscriptions, which seek out any and all passers-by to give them sound and spirit. It is this which is enacted in the graffito just quoted: the writer is the only one of the various actors

⁹⁰ Williams (2010) 294.

⁹¹ Svenbro (1993) 189–90.

⁹² Thus, Svenbro (1993) argues that Plato himself does not experience the same crisis around writing that his Socrates does, since Plato had taken steps (namely, the founding of the Academy) to 'defend and control his writings' (215–16).

described who plays a genuinely ‘active’ role, something which is announced in the poem’s first line and enacted in its last. He begins by creating the text as a material object and ends by taking possession of the reader’s voice to give it life.

As I have already noted, there is clearly a similarity between this process as it is shown in the graffito and that which is used by funerary inscriptions to create the living as tools of the dead. One important difference, however, exists: while texts found on tombs often will invite the passer-by to speak certain words, there is clearly a choice implied; *CIL* 2360 (*amat qui scribet*) uses a trick to stage its takeover of the reader’s voice. Thus, while both kinds of writing imagine themselves as functioning in a living, social world, and depend on the viewer’s participation to bring them to life in it, the graffito’s formulation of that relationship is adversarial, while funerary inscriptions attempt to make willing partners out of the living. In this way, the graffito poem quoted earlier is far more interested, and embroiled, in questions of power and authority—as, perhaps, is appropriate for a text which inserts itself into the street life of the ancient city. In a certain sense, the only hierarchy which is genuinely significant in funerary contexts is that between dead and alive. Graffiti exist in a more complicated world, a circumstance which is recorded and parodied in the various identities (writer, reader, critic, passer-by) described in *CIL* 2360. On the other hand, it is also worth noting that the absolute use of the verb *amo* to describe the writer makes this claim of authorial identity curiously abstract. Whom does the writer love? Himself? One of the others described in the poem? People in general? Or are writing and loving simply coextensive with one another? I will return to the question of graffiti authorship in Chapter 3, but for now suffice it to note that the Pompeian wall texts emerge between two traditions which prioritize the assertion of identity—in funerary inscription, of the commemorated deceased, and in literary epigram, of the poet himself. By contrast, 2360 simultaneously delineates a complex hierarchy of different sexual identities for people in relationship to the poem and refuses to define completely the fundamental role of the author.

Scholarly convention situates the study of ancient graffiti under the broader heading of ‘epigraphy’, alongside work on epitaphs, public records of laws, dedicatory texts, and so on. Yet each of the three graffiti poems discussed earlier situates itself differently in relationship to the other inscribed texts with which it shared the ancient

cityscape: *CIL* 4. 8899 (*hospes, adhuc tumuli*) directly quotes a line found elsewhere as a part of a funerary text, but at the same time plays with the imagined relationship between material and poetic monuments; *CIL* 4. 9123 (*nihil durare potest*) utilizes a new and different metrical form—the continuous pentameter—in the fashion of other, non-literary texts, while simultaneously embracing the way that meter can be used to create and reinforce poetic meaning; *CIL* 4. 2360 (*amat qui scribet*) foregrounds its role as a written document, but ultimately captures the reader's voice in the same way as is common in funerary epitaphs. Thus, while it is clear that there are separate traditions which trace the development of canonical literary epigram and more 'popular' epigraphic poetry, I would argue that we must see graffiti texts like these as the meeting point between the two, a place where amateur authors created works influenced by other texts found both on papyrus and on stone. In the sense that they were not constrained by particular generic rules, that they were free to pick and choose forms, ideas, and motifs from the various poetic discourses they encountered, the graffiti writers of Pompeii represent a kind of avant-garde fringe of the literary scene in the ancient Roman world. At the same time, it is important for the critic never to lose sight of graffiti as material objects embedded in the urban environment, continuously responding to and reshaped by their active participation in the life of the city.

IMAGE AND TEXT IN THE POMPEIAN CITYSCAPE

I spent a fair amount of time earlier comparing graffiti text with funerary epigrams, with whom they have much in common. One way in which epitaphs often create meaning, however, is through their interaction with images, which could be used to give a specificity and immediacy to the verbiage by offering a visual representation to capture a passer-by's attention.⁹³ Graffiti too existed alongside images in the urban environment, but it is less clear how the two media interacted. Each made different demands on the attention of the viewer, and they often appear in competition rather than cooperation

⁹³ Woolf (1996) 28; Koortbojian (1996) 225–6.

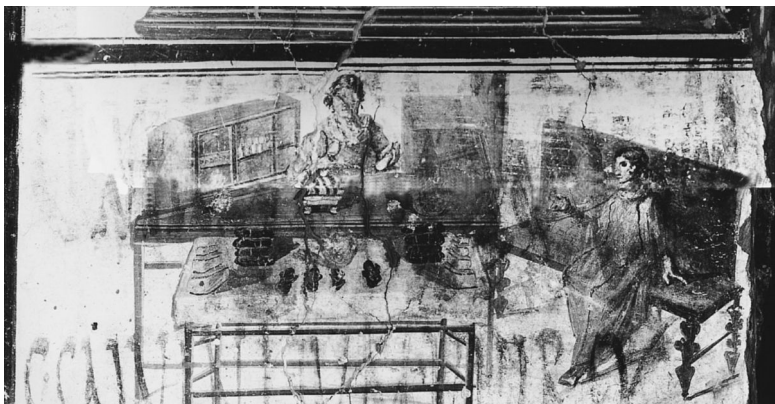


Figure 1.6. Shop sign outside 9. 7. 7 showing shoemakers and later programmata. Photograph by Michael Larvey.

with one another. Certainly the writers of programmata do not seem to have had much respect for the pictures which decorated the public walls on which they wished to write.⁹⁴ In general, little interest has been displayed in the relationship between graffiti and paintings in Roman public space, in part because it is only recently that scholars have given consideration to the complete experience of the ancient urban environment.⁹⁵ On the other hand, due to the focus of much recent criticism on the dynamics of ekphrasis, the question of where poetic texts have been added to explain or elaborate images has garnered some attention—although, not coincidentally, these tend to be elite, domestic spaces set well apart from the urban streetscape. Yet, as I will show here, we possess certain instances from ‘public’ Pompeii where there seems to be significant interest in the display of both visual and verbal art, suggesting that an interest in ekphrasis—or, more broadly,

⁹⁴ Thus the signs outside the shop at 9. 7. 7, one of which shows Mercury inside a temple, with shoemakers below; the other depicts Venus Pompeiana in an elephant quadriga above a felt-making scene. Both signs had, by the time of the eruption, been at least partially covered by painted programmata. In the case of the shoemaking scene, the words almost completely efface the images. For an image, see Figure 1.6.

⁹⁵ Kellum (1999) attempts a ‘wholistic’ approach by considering images, texts, and material environment in her reconstruction of ‘the spectacle of the street’; cf. Corbier (2006*b*) 91–128, which looks at all different types of writing (both licit and illicit) on images; Squire (2009*a*) only considers graffiti in the ‘House of Propertius’, as discussed later.

the complicated relationship between word and image—was present even in squarely popular contexts.

It is worth noting that we possess a small but significant number of texts which attest to the ancient Roman custom of writing poetry on the facades of buildings, usually shops or taverns.⁹⁶ The practice may have been more common in front of stalls which actually sold books—thus, for instance, Martial advises someone seeking a copy of his poems to look for *taberna | scriptis postibus hinc et inde totis, | omnis ut cito perlegas poetas* ('a shop, | with doorposts on both sides covered with writing | so that you can quickly read through all the poets': 1. 117. 10–12). Similarly, Seneca complains that the *ocliferia* ('eye-catching samples' of poetry⁹⁷) in front of bookshops mislead the viewer about the quality of what is inside. Horace, more vaguely, simply alludes to 'columns' which display poetry in the city,⁹⁸ making no mention of what kind of shops stood behind them (or indeed whether there were shops at all). Finally, Catullus in poem 37 famously threatens the denizens of a *salax taberna* that he will not only force them to perform oral sex on him, but *frontem tabernae sopionibus scribam* ('I will write obscene graffiti all over the face of the shop': 37. 10). Whether *sopiones* here are verbal or pictorial is difficult to say, but the point is clearly advertising, in this case, the violation just performed on the tavern's patrons.⁹⁹ Catullus thus draws a witty parallel between what he would like to do to the building and to its inhabitants, as each will have something obscene done to his face. But his threat also attests to the idea that shopfronts were places where, through writing or drawing, an individual might express his relationship to the space and the people within.

As this last example suggests, and the material evidence from Pompeii confirms, it was by no means simply ancient Roman bookshops which displayed poetry on their facades.¹⁰⁰ In fact, there is a wide range of writing preserved on both inside and outside walls of commercial establishments in the city, including (but not limited to)

⁹⁶ Although cf. the practice described in erotic contexts of writing poetry on the door or doorposts of the beloved, closely associated with the paraclausithyron. This will be discussed in Ch. 4.

⁹⁷ This is the translation of White (2009) 268–87, at 277.

⁹⁸ *Mediocribus esse poetas | non homines, non di, non concessere columnae: Ars Poetica* 372–3; *nulla taberna meos habeat neque pila libellos: Serm.* 1. 4. 71.

⁹⁹ Wray (2001) 93. ¹⁰⁰ Contra White (2009) 277–8.

the extended *epistola* from Hirtia Psacas to her husband and various other friends and relations, found in 1. 2. 7 (*CIL* 4. 3905); the various calculations on the wall of the *taberna vasaria* at 3. 4. 1 (*CIL* 4. 8859–68); and, next to the door of 1. 10. 2, the inscribed record of Successus the weaver's on-again off-again love affair with the barmaid Iris (*CIL* 4. 8259). Again, however, it is significant to note what is generally *not* written in these establishments: the name of the business, what it sells, or how much things cost.¹⁰¹ We do have one long graffito which seems at first to be an exception to this rule but ultimately underscores it. In part, *CIL* 4. 1679 reads *assibus hic bibitur, dipundium si dederis meliora bibes; quantus? Si dederis vina falerna bib(es)* ('for pennies, you can drink here [lit. it is drunk here]; if you give a dipondius, you will drink better; how much? If you will give [it] you will drink Falernian'). This has been supposed to be a sort of pricelist, which has led some scholars to assume it must have been found in a tavern;¹⁰² in fact, it was discovered in the atrium of a well-appointed house—the Casa dell'Orso Ferito (7. 2. 44–6), famous for its entryway mosaic featuring the eponymous bear and friendly greeting 'HAVE'. See Figure 1.7 for a map of the house and the findspot of the graffito. While it is true that there is a door near the graffito's findspot which leads from the house's atrium into a commercial space next door (at 7. 2. 44), this was certainly not the public entryway to the shop and therefore would not motivate the placement of a 'pricelist' in the elaborately decorated atrium of the *domus*.¹⁰³ Moreover, the inscription is at least partially metrical,¹⁰⁴ in dactyls and spondees, so probably represents a quotation from a popular song rather than a real advertisement of goods for sale.

¹⁰¹ Another potential exception which turns out not to be one is *CIL* 4. 806–7, a sign outside the tavern at 7. 1. 44–5. It reads *Sittius restituit elephantu(m)* ('Sittius has restored the Elephant') and (below) *Hospitium hic locatur triclinium cum tribus lectis* ('Inn here for rent. Dining room with three couches'). The inscription was accompanied by an image of an elephant and a pygmy fighting a snake. The import of the text seems to be that the inn itself was called 'Elephant', and that Sittius had either renovated the whole structure or just repainted the sign; the lower text offers the entire property for rent, listing the triclinium with its couches as some of its amenities: Mau and Kelsey (1899) 400. *CIL* 4. 5380 is a series of 'shopping lists' from an atrium connected to a *hospitium* rather than a price list, since it lists the same products multiple times: A. Cooley and M. G. L. Cooley (2004) 163.

¹⁰² e.g. Woekner (2002) 67–84, at 73.

¹⁰³ For a description of the house and its decoration, see Pappalardo (2001) 84.

¹⁰⁴ Bücheler includes it among the elegiacs in *CLE*, no. 931.

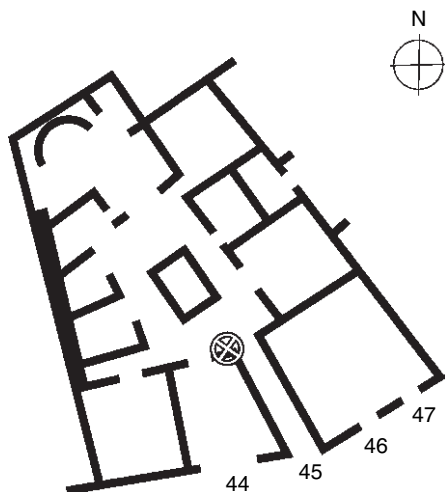


Figure 1.7. Plan of house 7.2.44–6 (Casa dell’Orso Ferito), showing findspot of *CIL* 4.1679. Redrawn by Sam Woolley.

The facades of *tabernae* are particularly interesting and useful sites for examining the role of writing in the ancient urban environment because they often featured a number of different ways of engaging the passer-by, including both words and images, and both authorized and unauthorized texts. Thus, for instance, it is worth considering the famous painting originally located to the left of the door of the *Caupona* of Euxinus (1. 11. 10–11), which featured a phoenix and two peacocks in a landscape, complete with garlands and ribbons above; below and to the right of the central image is the neatly lettered slogan *phoenix felix et tu* (‘the phoenix is lucky, and so (may) you (be)!’: *CIL* 4. 9850). See Figure 1.8 for a photograph. The painting seems to have served as a sign to identify the shop, something which is not uncommon in Pompeii although it is sometimes difficult to tell exactly why particular images are chosen to advertise individual establishments.¹⁰⁵ As always, we cannot know whether the writing was original to the painting or a later addition, but its author does seem to have made an effort to incorporate the text without damaging the image. On the other hand, like many other facade paintings, that on the front of the *Caupona* of Euxinus is surrounded by electoral programmata, one immediately below the image which asks support for

¹⁰⁵ Fröhlich (1991) 55.



Figure 1.8. Shop sign from Caupona of Euxinus (1. 11. 10–11), Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. Photograph from Bridgeman Images.

Q. Postumius and M. Cerrinius for aediles (*CIL* 4. 9851) and another very large one (20 cm high) below and to the right which asks support for 'Felix' for duovir.¹⁰⁶ The paint colour and letter formations between the programmata and the words on the painting are very similar, suggesting the possibility that 'phoenix felix' is a joke, perhaps written by the *scriptor* himself to underscore the sound coincidence between the name of the bird and that of the candidate.¹⁰⁷ Even if this

¹⁰⁶ *CIL* 4. 9852. For an image of the painted birds along with the programma below it, see *Notizie degli scavi* (1958) 83, nos. 25–6. This, presumably, is A. Vettius Caprasius Felix, who stood for the post in 74 CE: Franklin (1980) 67 and table 6.

¹⁰⁷ Kellum (1999) 287 suggests a connection between the programma and the painting's inscription, although she assumes that the inscription was original to the image.

hypothesis is accepted, however, it is clear that the owner of the *caupona* approved of the addition, since it was still present five years after Felix stood for duovir.

On one level, *phoenix felix* seems like the kind of cheerful salutation which one might expect to find in an advertisement for a tavern, but it is worth underscoring the fact that it also displays similar linguistic and inscriptive gestures to those found in funerary epitaphs and their *hospes* parody, already discussed. First, of course, is the direct address to the reader/viewer, the *tu* who is not only supposed to be lucky along with the phoenix, but is the audience for the joke on the phoenix's name and on the interplay between the programma, the text, and the image. One of the curious things about that joke, however, is that it is simultaneously oral and written—that is, not only is the form of the text that of a spoken address,¹⁰⁸ but the similarity between *phoenix* and *felix* is much clearer to the ear than on the wall. The intertextual joke, however, between the programma supporting Felix for duovir and the words on the painting depends on the reader's recognition and understanding of the two pieces of writing. In the sense, then, that it balances the immediate, direct experience of the reader with the imagined presence/permanence of the written text, it creates a place for itself in the living world in the same way as funerary epitaphs, which speak for the dead through the mouths of those still alive.¹⁰⁹ The difference, however, lies in the notional agency of the reader: unlike funerary inscriptions—which may ask various things of the passer-by, but contributing her own written words to the inscription is not among them—the fluidity of textual culture in the ancient Pompeian street at least opens the possibility that the reader may also write. Even if we decide that *phoenix felix* was original to the painted image outside the *Caupona* of Euxinus, the programma advertising Felix's candidacy was clearly not; whatever was the order in which the texts appeared, and even if they appeared at the same time, the message they communicate is of an ongoing dialogue between the facade of the shop and the writing community of the city.

That dialogue is not by any means limited to the outside front wall of shops, although the popularity of these spaces as sites for writing probably reflects both a cultural and actual openness of owners to the

¹⁰⁸ Corbier (2006c) 111.

¹⁰⁹ On which, see my discussion in the section 'Between epigraph and epigram'.

activity. A remarkable series of paintings found in the Tavern of Salvius (6. 14. 36) further underscores the extent to which individuals were empowered in commercial spaces to contribute in writing to the decorative schema. These images are well known, both because they offer comparatively rare depictions of everyday tavern life, and also because all four of the series—which appeared next to one another on the wall of the tavern in the fashion of a comic strip—include words painted next to the figures in each scene which the characters are presumably supposed to be speaking.¹¹⁰ John Clarke has drawn particular attention to these images, in part because he sees them as an elaborate set of jokes, to which the inscriptions are the punchlines, written by the original painter in order to add a humorous dimension to some fairly stock scenes.¹¹¹ This is possible, but does not explain why the texts appear to have been written in two different hands, one of which uses block capitals while the other is closer to the cursive style with double-stroke ‘e’.¹¹² (See Figure 1.9 for a photograph of the second scene, in which the two hands are distinguishable.) Especially since the cursive hand appears in one instance, the second scene, to have been appended below a text in the block capitals, it very much looks as though at least some of the writing was added to the images after they were first composed. Indeed, there is another tavern nearby which has a similar collection of images, two of which have attributed speech incised into the plaster above individual figures’ heads.¹¹³ The fact that only some of these images contain text, and that that text

¹¹⁰ In the first scene, above a man kissing a woman, is written *nolo cum Myrtale* (‘I won’t with Myrtale’). The second image features two men seated, and a server delivering wine; above the first man is *hoc* (‘here’), above the second, *non mia est* (‘no, it’s mine’), while the server says *qui vol sumat. Oceane veni bibe* (‘whoever wants it, take it! Oceanus, come drink’). The third scene shows men playing dice, one of whom says *exsi* (‘I won!’), and the other responds *non tria duas est* (‘it isn’t three, it’s two’). Finally, the last episode shows a fight between two men, with a third apparently attempting to break it up: the fighters say *noxi a me tria eco fui* (‘you brute, it was three to me. I was the winner!’) and *orte fellator eco fui* (‘get up, cocksucker. I was the winner!’). The peacemaker says *itis foras rixsatis* (‘go outside and fight there!’).

¹¹¹ For excellent images of the paintings and discussion, see J. Clarke (2007) 120–5.

¹¹² Note that the second hand actually does twice use the capital e formation, but only at the end of words (*Oceane* and *bibe*). The first hand uses the capital e throughout.

¹¹³ Clarke sees a profound difference between the painted texts and the incised ones, in part because the scratched graffiti have (to his eye) less humorous content. He assumes that the painted texts were written onto the paintings in the Tavern of Salvius by the painter: J. Clarke (2003) 168–9.

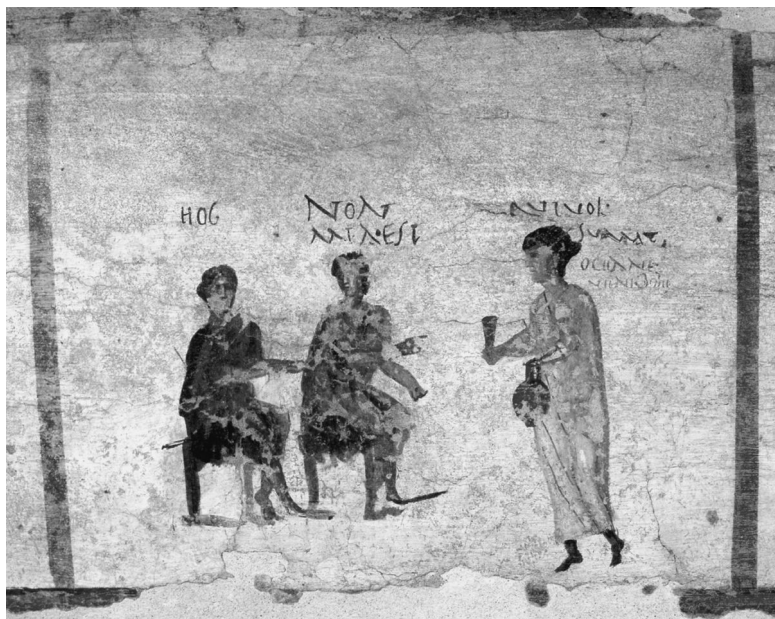


Figure 1.9. Fresco from Caupona of Salvius with added graffiti. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli; photograph by Michael Larvey.

appears in the form of scratched graffiti, suggests that such genre paintings could certainly appear without text to animate them, and that someone other than the painter could contribute his/her own words to the final product.

As I have already noted, much recent work has focused on instances where visual and verbal art intersect, that is, where the text in question is poetic. For my purposes, particularly noteworthy are instances where we find epigrams written directly on paintings, such as the ‘House of the Epigrams’ in Pompeii or the ‘House of Propertius’ in Assisi.¹¹⁴ Michael Squire has recently discussed the texts from the latter space, perhaps closer to the Pompeian material here discussed because they were inscribed and thus clearly later additions to the paintings on which they were found. By contrast,

¹¹⁴ On the House of the Epigrams, see Bergmann (2007) 60–101; and Prioux (2011) 13–34. On the House of Propertius, see Guarducci (1979) 269–97; and Squire (2009b) 239–93.

the epigrams which gave their name to the House of the Epigrams in Pompeii were painted neatly below the images, at the very least giving the impression that they were part of the original composition of the room's decor. Squire's argument about the Assisi inscriptions foregrounds the complex interaction between the epigrammatic texts and the pictures with which they were associated. He notes that, far from being simple verbal interpretations of the visual art, the poems seem to be 'learned', riddling responses to the paintings, so that 'text and image conflicted and collaborated each with the other' to create meaning in the space.¹¹⁵ In a similar vein, Bettina Bergmann has emphasized the ways that the poems—some by canonical authors—in the House of the Epigrams were paired with paintings which both completed and complicated the texts' significance. Thus, in each of these two elite, domestic spaces, the focus seems to be on using words not so much to explain the pictures but to add another artistic layer to the viewer's experience of the room. By contrast, whoever wrote on the Salvius pictures seems to have been striving for a different goal, as he, she, or (most likely) they sought to increase the transparency between real life and the images by attributing speech to the figures in them. Rather than using a detached third-person perspective to describe the scene before the viewer, the texts in the Caupona of Salvius offer instead the illusion that we are overhearing conversations taking place within the pictures; instead of adopting the pose of the viewer, the writer has adopted the position of the viewed.

The effect of this is, in essence, to put the focus once again on the immediacy—or perhaps we might say, the intimacy—of the experience of viewing and reading. The painted scenes in the Caupona of Salvius reflect the activities which might have occurred in the tavern (kissing, drinking, gambling, fighting); the person or persons who added the speech-texts were assisting in the illusion of transparency between image and life.¹¹⁶ Indeed, in the parallel examples from the caupona on the Street of Mercury (6. 10. 1), the scratched texts are so basic that they add little information to what can be understood visually from the images.¹¹⁷ We also have an instance from Pompeii

¹¹⁵ Squire (2009b) 291.

¹¹⁶ Corbier (2006c) 114 notes that the words 'eccentue le caractère illusionniste' of the painting.

¹¹⁷ Above a depiction of a servant pouring wine or water for a soldier is written *da fridam pusillum* ('give me a bit of cold water': *CIL* 4. 1291) and above another servant

where painted inscriptions and written ones appear side by side on similar images. In the House of the Triclinium, one painting features neat painted dialogue above the diners in a symposium scene: one man says *faciatis vobis suaviter, ego canto* ('Make yourselves at home, I'm going to sing') and someone else responds, *est ita, valea(s)* ('Sure thing! To your health!'). Although this text may have been part of the original painted composition—John Clarke notes that the lettering was done 'in good fresco technique'¹¹⁸—a painting on the next wall, which also features a dining scene, has simple scratched labels which must surely post-date the original decoration of the room: one man says, *valeatis* ('To everyone's health!') while another remarks simply *bibo* ('I'm drinking'). Like the images from the two *cauponiae* already discussed, these pictures were supposed to reflect the activities which took place in the spaces they decorated, a gesture which is assisted by both formal and informal additions of text. But if we may imagine that the painted texts preceded the addition of the graffiti, it seems that the latter may simply attest to the power of suggestion: seeing the words on the first image, a viewer decided to write his/her own on another painting in the same room.

Of course, in these instances the verbal 'response' to the paintings in question was not poetic and thus, perhaps, may be said to have been pursuing a less lofty artistic goal than the epigrams found in Assisi or those from Pompeii's own House of the Epigrams. We do, however, possess a couple of instances in which images in commercial space have been paired with poetry, so that—in the same way that *phoenix felix* did—they allow us the opportunity to consider different ways that art, both verbal and visual, functioned in the urban environment. In fact, one important example comes from the Caupona of Euxinus, that which advertised itself with the *phoenix felix*. Although the cookshop's sign, with its well-rendered birds and clever inscription, has attracted a great deal of interest, far less has been given to the other paintings and their attendant texts which originally adorned the space. Although the cookshop itself was fairly small, it opens into a large garden area which was probably used for dining, and contained a small, cheerfully-painted open-air room and something which may have been an arbour. In addition, Wilhelmina Jashemski showed

with a customer or master, *adde calicem setinum* ('give me a glass of Saentinum (wine)': *CIL* 4. 1292). For a description and discussion, see J. Clarke (2003) 241–3.

¹¹⁸ J. Clarke (2003) 243.

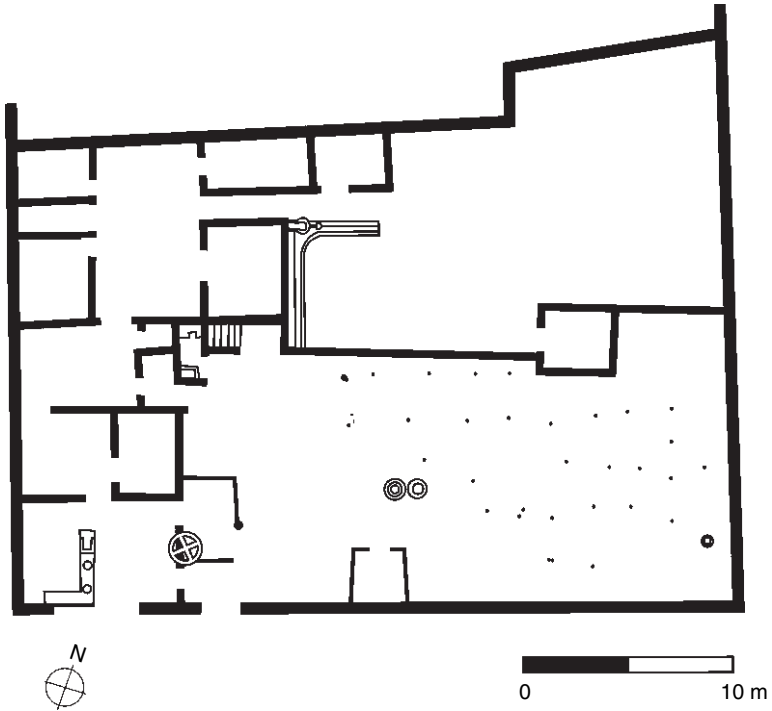


Figure 1.10. Map of the Caupona of Euxinus, showing findspot of *CIL* 4. 9847–9, after W. Jashemski, 'The Caupona of Euxinus at Pompeii', *Archaeology* 20.1 (1967) 38. Redrawn by Sam Woolley.

through excavation and casting of the hollows left by root systems that it was also originally planted as a vineyard.¹¹⁹ The wall of a latrine in the north-west corner of the garden/vineyard is decorated by a painting of a large snake. In fact, the Caupona of Euxinus seems to have had a great deal of rather brightly coloured decoration: in addition to that which I have already mentioned, a painting of the god Priapus and one of Bacchus originally flanked the entrance to the shop from the vineyard.

When these paintings were uncovered in 1955, they were left exposed to the elements and quickly vanished, so that by 1964 when Jashemski excavated the garden space no trace remained. They were

¹¹⁹ On the space, see Jashemski (1967) 36–44. See Figure 1.10 for a map of the space.

unfortunately neither photographed nor fully described by original excavators, so we must take the identifications of the subjects on faith—although Priapus and Bacchus make good sense for the presiding deities of a vineyard. But the other thing which is now lost are the poems which were associated with these images. Painted underneath Bacchus was [*venimus h*]oc cupidi, multo magis ire cupimus, a common popular tag found in numerous other places in Pompeii.¹²⁰ Under Priapus in red letters was a longer set of verses (*CIL* 4. 9847):

Candida me docuit nigras o[di]sse
 puellas | otero si potero [s]i non
 invitus amabo
 A white girl taught me to hate dark
 girls. I will hate if I can; if not
 I will love unwillingly

And a little further below (*CIL* 4. 9848):

Hic duo rivales ca<n>ont
 Una puella tenet fasces
 Tr [------]s cui fas
 Ar[------]ae
 Here two rivals sang.
 A single girl held the fasces
 ----- for whom it is right(?)

Under examination, the first three lines resolve themselves into a pair of hexameters. They represent a quotation, a mixture of the two most popular elegiac poets in Pompeii's streets: Propertius 1. 1. 4–6 is the source for the first hexameter (*Amor . . . donec me docuit castas odisse puellas | improbus*) and the second is a direct quotation from Ovid's *Amores* (3. 11. 35).¹²¹ It is curious but not unusual that the two-line couplet appears on the wall in three written lines, perhaps in order to isolate and underscore visually the paradoxical *invitus amabo*, which

¹²⁰ *CIL* 4. 9849. On this tag, and its significance in the popular poetic culture of Pompeii, see Ch. 3.

¹²¹ E. Courtney has argued, principally on the basis of this graffito, that the line has actually been interpolated into Ovid's text: (1987) 7–18. He still sees it as 'genuine . . . ancient poetry', probably quoted from some other, unknown, canonical poet. He does not address the line from Propertius.

appears in the transcription provided by the *Notizie degli scavi*¹²² neatly centred below the other two lines and in letters perhaps slightly larger than the rest.

It is difficult to know what to make of the ‘two rivals’ of the further inscription, especially given the mangled last lines. Maiuri suggested that the reference is to a singing contest (as in Virgil, *Eclogue* 3) which produced the poem above it on the wall the prize for which was the affection of the barmaid.¹²³ This strikes me as a little fanciful, especially since it is not clear why the poem would then have been painted on the wall. I am more inclined to imagine that the reference is not to an actual singing contest, but is meant instead to evoke the bucolic atmosphere associated with them. This was, after all, a vineyard, but one which also included some large shade trees, an arbour, and two small altars at the eastern end. In short, I would argue that what we should see here is a sort of Hellenistic countryside in microcosm, with all of the elements—including poetry—which characterized this kind of fictional rustic landscape. The painted poems then would be a contribution to the atmosphere, both in what they say and in the fact that they are present: even if a viewer was unable to read them, the fact that there were words on the wall could be seen and appreciated. We are used to the idea of fantastic gardens in the houses of the Pompeian well-to-do—thus, for instance, the spectacular series of marble water features nearby in the House of Octavius Quarto. There too we have mythological or literary references in the painted decoration: Narcissus, Pyramus and Thisbe, Acteon and Diana populate the walls of the upper terrace. The ‘vineyard’ of the Caupona of Euxinus is more modest in scope and the quality of execution, but should still be seen as having the ambition to create a similarly imaginative landscape for the enjoyment of those who occupied the space.

Indeed, Wilhelmina Jashemski drew attention to the parallels between the archaeological evidence in Pompeii and the pseudo-Virgilian *Copa*, a poem in which a *taberna* is described as having a lush, landscaped garden. She notes that although many Roman *tabernae* probably were dark, dirty, and flea-ridden—as they often appear in Latin literature—there were also a number of dining establishments in Pompeii which offered guests the opportunity to dine outside, in relatively elegant style. In fact, in at least one instance discussed by

¹²² *Notizie degli scavi* (1958), 83–4.

¹²³ *Notizie degli scavi* (1958), 83–4.

Jashemski, an innkeeper who did not have the physical space to provide an extensive garden had one painted on the back wall of his existing plot. Thus, the *Copa's* vision of a bucolic picnic (complete with fruit trees (l. 17 ff.), garlands (35), and even a shepherd (10))¹²⁴ in a *taberna* is not as far-fetched as it might at first appear.¹²⁵ Although the *Copa's* juxtapositioning of the notoriously urban space of the *caupona* and the bucolic countryside may have been part of the text's play with convention,¹²⁶ it would seem that real bar-owners in Pompeii also saw the appeal of the paradox. Moreover, it is worth noting that two of the deities which the *Copa* imagines presiding over the proffered picnic are Bacchus (l. 20) and Priapus (23–4), those represented on the wall of the *Caupona* of Euxinus under which were painted the poetic lines described earlier. We cannot, of course, see direct influence of the *Copa* on the denizens of Pompeii, at least in part because the date of the text is still very much an open question.¹²⁷ On the other hand, I would argue that the very existence of the poem suggests that others in Roman culture saw a possible association between the space of the *taberna*, the deities of the pastoral landscape, and poetic production.

If we accept this reading of the garden space in the *Caupona* of Euxinus, the amatory theme of the texts displayed there makes sense, since lovelorn shepherds were a generic commonplace in pastoral poetry. Moreover, the proprietor of the *Caupona* of Euxinus—or whoever chose the texts to be painted below the images on the garden wall—selected poetic fragments which his guests might well have recognized. Both epigrams, if they might be termed such, are also found elsewhere in Pompeii, suggesting that they had a presence in the popular poetic discourse of the city. I will discuss *venimus huc cupidi* further in Chapter 3; *candida me docuit* is a more curious case. More than a hundred years before the excavation of Euxinus'

¹²⁴ For a description of the bucolic elements in the *Copa*, as well as a discussion of the text's other affiliations with canonical elegy, see Cutolo (1990) 115–19.

¹²⁵ Jashemski (1964) 337–49.

¹²⁶ V. J. Rosivach argues that the *Copa* deliberately juxtaposes elements of high and low culture: (1996) 605–14.

¹²⁷ Most scholars see it as pre-Ovidian, due to the lack of disyllabic endings in the pentameter; R. J. Tarrant, however, has argued that it should be dated later, perhaps as late as the early 2nd century (Tarrant (1992) 331–47). M. Grant compares the themes present in the *Copa* with those in Pompeian amatory graffiti, and suggests that the two may be close in date: (2001) 121–36.

cookshop, excavators had already identified this poem, scratched this time, into the wall plaster of the atrium in the so-called House of the Scientists (5. 14. 43).¹²⁸ This is one of the large and well-appointed atrium houses in the wealthy north-west quadrant of the city, only a block away from both the House of the Vetii and the House of the Faun. Here again we may see that the couplet does not maintain its form, although the line divisions are different—in this case the point may have been to begin and end the first line with the important thematic words *candida* and *nigras*. The couplet is, however, set off from the rest of the wall by two parallel lines, which bracket it and its ‘signature’—*scripsit Venus fisica Pompeiana* (‘Venus “fisica” of Pompeii wrote [this]’) is written below the two hexameters (see Figure 1.11 for a line drawing). Indeed, the same atrium also contained not only three other graffiti fragments of the same poem (*candida me docuit* is repeated several times), but also a quotation from Virgil’s second *Eclogue* (*Rusticus es Corydon*) and the beginning of a line from the first book of the *Aeneid* (*Antenor potuit*). My point is that the *candida me docuit* poem may have little meaning in itself, but its readers and writers seem to have occupied diverse class positions, from the owner/occupier of the Caupona of Euxinus and

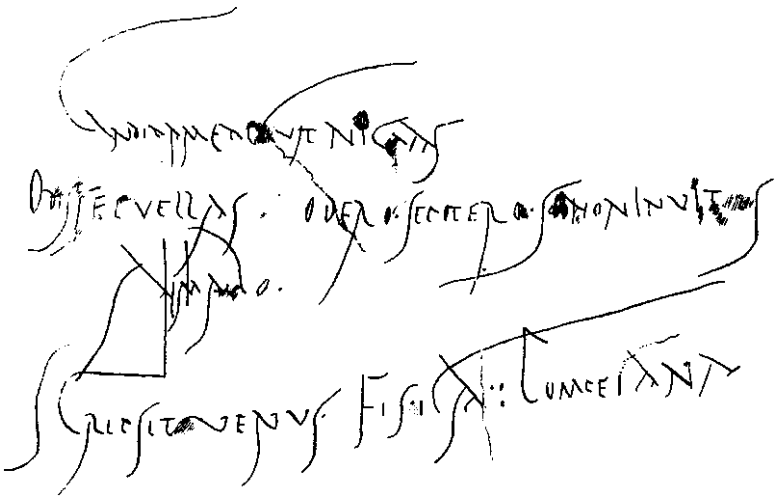


Figure 1.11. Line drawing of CIL 4. 1520, from CIL vol. 4.

¹²⁸ CIL 4. 1520, 1523, 1526, 1528, 3040.

his patrons to the apparently wealthy and educated denizens of the House of the Scientists.

There is, in other words, continuity between the painted text in the *Caupona* of Euxinus and scratched graffiti found elsewhere in the city. And while it is certainly possible that both media were quoting some other, external source, the fact remains that the owner of the *caupona* appears deliberately to have chosen these erotic verses as part of the bucolic landscape which he sought to create in his garden. This suggests not only that he was participating in a wider, popular poetic discourse in Pompeii, but also that he saw the texts as poetry proper, not simply as words on a wall. The vineyard of the *Caupona* of Euxinus is genuinely a literary landscape, which includes all the elements—plants, deities, altars, and poetry—to allow the guests briefly to inhabit a pastoral idyll. Of course, the *caupona*'s owner/decorator had a clear motive for giving his customers a pleasant, elegant, and somewhat fantastic experience in his garden. Yet there is evidence from elsewhere in the city that the idea of pastoral poetry might be less formally associated with a *taberna* and the images which adorned its facade. The cookshop at 7. 6. 34–5 also displayed pictures of deities, in this instance Bacchus and Mercury. This particular shop has become famous because its decoration also included the image of victory crowning an ass who is penetrating a lion, a picture which has been commonly interpreted as an allegory of the battle of Actium.¹²⁹ The paintings of the gods have gone generally unremarked, however, as have the graffiti texts which also adorned the shop's facade. Particularly noteworthy for our purposes are the verses which appeared scratched neatly below the painting of Mercury (*CIL* 4. 1645; see Figure 1.12 for a line drawing of this and the following text):

Si quis forte meam cupiet vio[lare
puel<l>am | illum in desertis
montibus urat amor

If someone by chance desires to violate
my girl, may love burn him
in empty mountains.

¹²⁹ First in Minervini (1859) 68–71. For a discussion of the different interpretations, see J. Clarke (2007) 109–20.

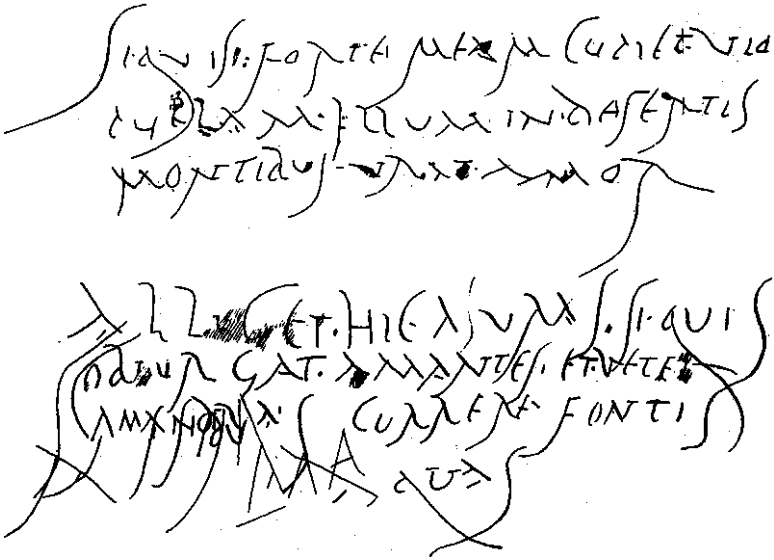


Figure 1.12. Line drawing of *CIL* 4. 1645 and 1649, from *CIL* vol. 4.

And, further down (*CIL* 4. 1649):

Alliget hic auras si quis
 obiurgat amantes | et vetet
 assiduas currere fontis
 aquas

Let him bind the breezes, he who
 scolds lovers, and let him forbid
 the incessant waters of a spring
 to flow

Both texts resolve into elegiac couplets (more or less), although, again, they do not appear written on the wall according the metrical schema.

Unlike the verses from the Caupona of Euxinus, of course, these lines are graffiti proper (that is, scratched into the plaster) rather than part of a painted composition. Yet both the fact that they were written in large, neatly formed, and easily read letters, and that they appeared directly beneath the image of Mercury suggest a parallel with the Euxinus paintings. The longer poetic fragments appeared there underneath a figure identified at the time of excavation as Priapus;

if, however, the image conformed to others found near cooking establishments in Pompeii, it is possible that Mercury, or Mercury-Priapus, has here been mistaken solely for the latter because of the conflation of attributes. After all, 'this pair [*sc.* Dionysus and Mercury] . . . appears on the facades of many commercial establishments as bringers of good fortune to the establishment and its clientele. Sometimes Mercury took on the same meaning as phallic apotropaia.¹³⁰ Thus, it would be no surprise to find them decorating the vineyard in the Caupona of Euxinus. If we take the Euxinus 'Priapus' as Mercury-Priapus, then, the similarity with the Mercury painting-and-poetry combination in Regio 7 is even clearer; if not, we still have a god of prosperity and abundance who presides over (literally) texts which have their roots in a kind of literary discourse.

Although, as I said, the couplets which were written on the front of the shop at 7. 6. 34–5 are not direct quotations from any canonical source which has survived to us, they clearly make use of the tropes of Latin elegy: possessive love, the rival for the beloved, intractable desire. In particular, however, in noting their possible connection with the decoration of the vineyard in the Caupona of Euxinus, their citation of the elements of landscape stands out: *CIL* 4. 1645 refers to the 'empty mountains' (*in desertis montibus*) and 1649 speaks of 'the breezes' (*auras*) and the 'incessant waters of a spring' (*assiduas fontis aquas*). Like the physical elements in Euxinus' vineyard—the vines, the altars, the arbour, and so on—these verbal motifs point to the pastoral world which was one element in canonical Latin poetry. Indeed, although the paintings themselves have perished, Fiorelli provided a description of the two images: 'on the end pilasters, the figures of Bacchus on foot between two vines, resting on the thyrsus and with a cup in his hand from which he pours liquid for a tiger; and Mercury walking to the right with the caduceus and a purse'.¹³¹ In other words, the images of the gods place them in an environment, but not one which (especially in the case of Bacchus) reflects the city around them. The paintings, then, with which the epigrams are associated, thus also become part of the poetic landscape, the presiding deities now not for an urban *taberna* but for the hills and streams of a bucolic idyll.

¹³⁰ J. Clarke (2007) 117–18.

¹³¹ 'su i pilastri estremi le figure di Baccho in piedi fra due viti, poggiate al tirso e col cantaro in mano, da cui versa il liquore alla tigre; e Mercurio gradiente a dr. col caduceo e la borsa' (Pappalardo (2001) 160).

The relationship between 'literature' and the urban environment in imperial Rome has generally been explored from the textual side: scholars have shown the intimate connection between, for instance, Cicero's speeches and the physical environment in which his listeners stood, between Virgil's description of contemporary Rome in book 8 of the *Aeneid* and its material reality, or between the epigrams of Martial and the Roman streets familiar to his readers.¹³² What the Pompeian wall texts allow us to do, however, is to consider not just how literature reflects or refracts material reality, but how it actually inhabited it, at a fairly base and concrete level. Certainly, not every cookshop had the pretensions of that belonging to Euxinus, where the customer could dine poetically in a vineyard; indeed, the proprietor of the establishment at 7. 6. 34–5 seems to have contented himself simply with displaying images of poetic gods outside his shop, leaving it up to a customer or customers to contribute their own 'literate' additions. But what these text-and-image combinations show—in the same way as the epigrams which I considered in the section 'Between epitaph and epigram'—is how the poetic culture of the Pompeian street embraced its material role in the ancient urban environment. Rather than existing as a kind of veneer over, detached reading of, or hostile reaction to, contemporary society, these texts illustrate the idea that graffiti poetry was an inseparable part of the city, a genuine, important, and accepted popular art. In Chapter 2, I will continue to explore the ways in which this art was used in the streets of Pompeii, but will focus on an area in which popular poetry was seen as (in certain senses) 'appropriate' by ancient authors, namely politics. Yet here too we will see that the story told by the Pompeian evidence is both simpler and more complicated than the historical record leads us to expect.

¹³² e.g. Cicero: Vasaly (1993); Virgil: W. W. Fowler (1917) and Boyle (1999) 148–61; Martial: Roman (2010) 88–117.

Poetic Politics, Political Poetics

One of the great questions about Pompeian graffiti is the extent to which they do or do not conform to the themes and patterns of wall writings which are represented in ancient literary sources. This is a particularly interesting and difficult issue when we consider the realm of politics. Many Roman historical texts quote graffiti which they say appeared on walls in Rome and other cities during particular moments of civic conflict. Cicero, Strabo, Suetonius, Plutarch, and Aulus Gellius all describe episodes—real or imagined—in which urban wall writing serves as a kind of *vox populi*, generally sharply critical of the actions of the powerful.¹ Perhaps the most famous example is the story which Plutarch reports—twice—that Brutus was convinced to participate in the conspiracy against Caesar by graffiti critical of the dictator (*Brutus* 9. 3; *Caesar* 62. 4). In a similar vein, Suetonius notes that one sign of Nero’s loss of popularity was a proliferation of writings on his statues and around the city (*Nero* 45). Aulus Gellius even records some *senarii* with which Publius Venti-dius Bassus, who had served as a muleteer in his youth, was lampooned after he was made consul during the Second Triumvirate (*NA* 15. 4. 3):²

Eam . . . rem tam intoleranter tulisse populum Romanum . . . ut vulgo per vias urbis versiculi prosciberentur: concurrite omnes augures, haruspices! | protentum inusitatum conflatum est recens: | nam mulos qui fricabat, consul factus est.

¹ Cf. Cicero, *de Orat.* 2. 59. 240; Strabo *Geography* 674; Plutarch, *C. Gracchus* 17.

² For a discussion of these verses’ relationship to the Latin iambic tradition, and particularly to *Catalepton* 10, see Morgan (2010) 155–6.

[It is written that] the Roman populace reacted so badly to this circumstance that verses were written up widely throughout the streets of the city: 'come one, come all, ye priests, ye prophets! | A strange omen has just now flared up: | for one who used to rub down mules has been made consul.'

Although it is likely that the Roman plebs were especially politically attuned, graffiti attacks on public figures and comments on civic affairs were seen in the provinces as well. Cicero notes that one way in which the people of Sicily demonstrated their unhappiness with Verres was by means of graffiti insulting to his mistress, prominently inscribed above the tribunal platform so that they could be read over the praetor's head.³

In contrast with the evidence found in literary sources, however, the actual textual fragments from the walls of Pompeii give, on the surface, little insight into popular opinion on civic matters, to the point that Paul Veyne uses the graffiti as evidence that the ancient urban populace at this time held no political opinions.⁴ This is a difficult position to sustain in general, especially because it depends on ignoring the single best source we have for small-town politics in the early Empire, namely the painted election notices or *programmata* which line many streets in Pompeii. These signs generally express support for a particular candidate for public office on behalf of an individual or a group, but, for Veyne, they do not count as representations of political discourse since they are simply 'acclamations', celebrations of local *euergetai* who have kept the price of bread reasonable and provided lavish gladiatorial games.⁵ While it is clearly a mistake to consider that only dissent, and dissent specifically coded as dissent, constitutes genuine civic engagement, it is true that the programmata do not offer much of a sense of debate, since they generally confine themselves to brief, positive statements about

³ *Verr.* 2. 3. 77.

⁴ Veyne (1990) 295–6. Morstein-Marx (2012) 1–27, at 10–11, notes that this gap in the evidence may be attributable to the impermanence of the graffiti medium, as well as to the fact that 'the odds are against the appearance and especially the survival of unauthorized and even subversive communication on public surfaces' (10). On the other hand, it is curious that our literary and historical sources are so much at odds with the state of the actual evidence from Pompeian walls. For an attempt to attribute this disconnect to bias against both 'popular literature' and political dissent in elite texts, see Zadorojnyi (2011) 110–33.

⁵ Veyne (1990) 296.

the character of the candidate they seek to support. The other writings found on Pompeii's walls, moreover, also tend towards the personal, generally consisting of jeers, jokes, and the records of love affairs. Of course, it is likely that the political conversation as it actually happened at the level of the street was more complex and difficult to read than our literary sources would lead us to believe. Thus, for instance, insults to a public figure's sexual preferences or practices could relate to disapproval of his policies; quotations from poets could be deployed to comment on current affairs.⁶ Without greater knowledge of the details of local public affairs and personalities, it is difficult to determine which among the Pompeian texts is 'political' and which is not.

In this context, it is worth taking note of a story told by Cicero in the *de Oratore*, where Julius reminds Crassus that the latter made up a story to attack Gaius Memmius, tribune in 111 BCE, which claimed that he had sunk his teeth into a certain Largus during a brawl: 'You added a final comment, namely that every wall in Terracina was inscribed with the letters LLLMM; and when you inquired what it meant, some old man of the town told you "Mouthy Memmius laid into the limb of Largus"'.⁷ Part of the joke is that the letters could just as easily have been part of a political advertisement, where such abbreviations were common. Thus, what might have originally been an alliterative slogan such as *Lege Laetus Lubens Merito Memmium* has been transformed into the lampooning jingle *Lacerat Lacertum Largi Mordax Memmius*. But perhaps more significant is the way the story turns on the interpretive help of the old townsman, who explains the text's 'true' meaning to the aristocrat. That is, the proof of Crassus' successful rumour-mongering is found not so much in the inscription, which could mean anything, but in the old man's reading of it; wall texts are imagined in this story not as clear and easily comprehensible vehicles of popular opinion, but as texts which speak from and most clearly to a popular audience.

In addition, however, this story from the *de Oratore* also underscores something else about the canonical textual representation of urban graffiti, namely the fact that they are frequently poetic. This

⁶ As at Suetonius *Iul.* 84. 2; *Aug.* 53. 1.

⁷ *Addidisti clausulam, tota Terracina tum omnibus in parietibus inscriptas fuisse litteras, LLLMM; cum quaereres id quid esset, senem tibi quendam oppidanum dixisse 'Lacerat Lacertum Largi Mordax Memmius'* (*De orat.* 2. 59. 240).

shows up in Cicero's text in the fact that, when questioned, the old townsman produces a senarius,⁸ the same metrical pattern as that of the graffiti *versiculi* quoted by Gellius in the passage earlier. It is true that the senarius is a metrical pattern so flexible, and so close to the rhythms of everyday speech, that it would not have been difficult to produce, but historical works from the Roman period also offer examples of graffitied political critiques expressed in other meters. Thus, for example, among the other texts which Suetonius records to show the unpopularity of Nero is the epigram *Quis negat Aeneae magna de stirpe Neronem? | sustulit hic matrem, sustulit ille patrem* ('who denies that Nero comes from the great lineage of Aeneas? | One carried off his mother, the other his father': *Nero* 39. 2). Suetonius is certainly the most fertile source for such popular political poetry, citing inscribed stanzas about Julius Caesar, Augustus, and Nero.⁹ In addition, however, the inscriptions against Verres noted by Cicero, cited earlier, are also described as poetic¹⁰ and Plutarch provides a mocking 'verse' (στυχός) which was written on the Temple of Concord after it was dedicated by Lucius Opimius in 121 BCE.¹¹

Of course, it has long been recognized that poetry played an important role, in Roman daily life generally but specifically in political contexts.¹² Particularly the use of the senarius, most widely known as a comic meter in Latin, may be linked to the role which the theatre played as one of the few places where the populace might encounter the powerful directly. Indeed, it has been suggested that, with the demise of popular assemblies under the principate, the circus and the theatre took on increasing importance as sites of

⁸ Ritschl (1866–9) 238.

⁹ *Iul.* 80.3; *Aug.* 70. 2; *Nero* 39. 2. Cf. *Aug.* 55. 1, in which Augustus is attacked by poetic *libelli* which are *sparsos* . . . *in curia* ('scattered about the Senate chamber'). These are probably broadsheets or placards (as they seem to be at Suetonius *Caes.* 41 and *Vit.* 14).

¹⁰ Cicero tells us that Verres was having an affair with the wife of a prominent Syracusan, 'about whom many verses were being written over the tribunal platform and above the praetor's head' (*de qua muliere versus plurimi supra tribunal et supra praetoris caput scribebantur*: *Verr.* 2. 3. 77).

¹¹ Opimius had brutally suppressed the protests which followed the death of Gaius Gracchus, leading someone to write underneath the temple's dedicatory inscription, 'a deed of discord makes a temple of concord' (*Ἔργον ἀπονίας ναὸν ὁμονοίας ποιεῖ*): Plutarch, *Grac.* 17. The line scans in Greek as an iambic trimeter, so long as we are willing to emend *ποιεῖ* to *ποιεῖ* (a poetic alternative). It seems likely, though, that Plutarch is providing a Greek translation of a Latin original.

¹² Habinek (2005); Horsfall (2003) 31–47.

confrontation over civic matters, and that the more-or-less organized *clagues* in the crowd formed the political ‘opposition’ with which emperors needed to reckon.¹³ It is also important to remember that the role which memorization played in Roman culture and education means that aids to memory such as rhythm had a natural place in popular speech,¹⁴ and that music or chanting concerning public matters and figures would have been heard at triumphs and other mass gatherings, formal or informal.¹⁵ In these contexts, chants, especially those with an easily remembered rhythm or pattern, could even be recycled from one occasion to another: David Potter suggests that the popular verse *salva Roma, sava patria, salvus est Germanicus* which irritated Tiberius in 16 CE was left over from Germanicus’ triumph three years earlier.¹⁶ Our sources not infrequently will quote a verse which *vulgatum est* (‘was spread around’) or a similar phrase, leaving the manner of dissemination undefined.¹⁷ Although there certainly existed books and anonymous pamphlets of satirical epigrams,¹⁸ other modes of distribution must have included the *circulatores*, or street performers—who, in Persius’ formulation, ‘recited the consul’s edict in the morning . . . [and] at midday delivered silly poems’¹⁹—simple word of mouth, and graffiti.

On the one hand, then, our literary historical sources offer ample testimony that wall writing was an important site where popular opinions about politics came together with popular expressions of poetics. On the other, little actual evidence of this has been seen in the Pompeian graffiti. Scholars who have sought what our ancient sources would lead us to expect, namely poems which critique the political status quo, have been sorely disappointed; although we do

¹³ André (1990) 165–73; Potter (1996) 129–59; Beacham (1999) esp. 160–1.

¹⁴ Horsfall (2003) 11–19.

¹⁵ On poetry at triumphs, see Beard (2007) 247–9; primary sources include Suetonius, *Iul.* 49. 4, 51. 2. Suetonius also tells us that Augustus was accustomed to be welcomed home from a province with *modulatis carminibus* (*Aug.* 57. 2) and that Tiberius was awoken by the people chanting (*concinentium*) praises of Germanicus outside his window (*Calig.* 6. 1).

¹⁶ Potter (1996) 138. On this text and the versus quadratus, see Courtney (2003) 478.

¹⁷ Tac. *Annales* 1. 72. 4; Suetonius *Iul.* 20. 2, *Tib.* 59. 1, *Nero* 39. 2, *Aug.* 80. 2, *Calig.* 8. 1, *Claud.* 1. 1, etc.

¹⁸ Tac. *Annales* 1. 72. 4; 14. 48; Suetonius *Aug.* 55. 1.

¹⁹ *circulatores, qui mane edictum consulis . . . recitant, meridie levia carmina dicunt*: Persius 1. 134; P. O’Neill, ‘Going Round in Circles: Popular Speech in Ancient Rome’, *ClAnt* 22. 1 (2003) 135–76, at 151–2.

possess the innumerable programmata, which deal directly with politics, they clearly emerge from within the civic establishment and are generally within a rather particular prose style. Thus, for instance, *CIL* 4. 3527 runs, *Pupium Ilvir(um) I(ure) d(icundo) o(rat) v(os) f(aciatis) Appuleia cum Mustio vicino f(ullone) et Narcissus vos roga(nt)* ('Appuleia, along with her neighbour Mustius the fuller and Narcissus, ask that you make Pupius duovir'); similarly, *CIL* 4. 1059 offers, *M(arcum) Epidium Sabinum II vir(um) iur(e) dic(undo) o(rat) v(os) f(aciatis) dignum iuven(em) Suedius Clemens sanctissimus iudex facit vicinis rogantibus* ('Suedius Clemens, the most righteous judge, asks that you vote for Marcus Epidius Sabinus, a worthy young man, for duovir; [he] does this because his neighbours requested it'). Pompeii clearly had a lively political scene, the mechanics of which we are still exploring, and into which the electoral programmata can provide important insight.²⁰

Pompeian programmata, however, have not attracted much attention from literary scholars, for perhaps obvious reasons: their language and content does not admit much variety, and their style is squarely 'epigraphic', evident in both the heavy emphasis on naming and in the widespread use of abbreviation. Moreover, sign painting was a skilled trade, so that we possess a number of examples of programmata (and other advertisements, such as for gladiatorial games) which proclaim themselves to be the work of particular individuals, the most famous of whom was a certain Aemilius Celer.²¹ They are painted in clear, often flamboyantly formed, letters, the size of which varies but can reach as much as 18 inches high; the programmata were something that someone was paid to do, and they look like it (see Figure 2.1 for examples). This contrasts with the numerous examples of graffiti proper scratched into the walls of Pompeii and Herculaneum. Short, witty, and often off-colour, they seem informal and spur of the moment; the letters are small and far less visible than those of the boldly painted programmata; they are usually anonymous and the longer scratched texts often have risqué

²⁰ There have been some noteworthy contributions over the years to the study of Pompeian politics through the programmata, including Franklin (1980); Mouritsen (1988); Staccioli (1992); Franklin (2001); Chiavia (2002); Weeber (2007). There is an ongoing debate over whether, and to what extent, we may see the widespread existence of programmata as evidence of a more or less 'democratic' political process: for a summary of the debate, see Mouritsen (1999) 515–23.

²¹ Franklin (1978) 54–74.



Figure 2.1. Pompeian programmata. Photograph by author.

or erotic themes. Since this last group includes most of the texts which were composed as poems, it becomes clear how and why scholarship has separated the two types of wall writing into distinct categories: the electoral programmata have been seen as a real and legitimate form of historical document, sober, political, and closer in form and tone to public inscriptions on stone, while the scratched graffiti poems are understood as a mongrel variant of literary text, frivolous, personal, and fundamentally only of interest to those studying the margins of ancient social life.

In general terms, there is certainly some validity to these characterizations. At the same time, though, I would argue that the imagined divide between history and politics on the one hand (programmata) and poetry and erotics on the other (literary graffiti) has led us to miss moments when our source materials actually transcend that boundary, creating a political poetics or a poetic politics. It cannot be forgotten that, whatever distinctions we make as modern scholars, graffiti and programmata shared space in the ancient city, jostling up against one another and contending for space on the same walls in the same streets. For this reason, if no other, it makes sense that they should also sometimes share ideas, forms, and themes. But I also think that we should not allow ourselves to be blinded by a narrow notion of what civically engaged speech looks like, or to forget that literary language may be used to serve political

ends. In this chapter, therefore, I first look at instances of poetic forms and language in the programmata, in an attempt to identify where and why we can find traces of 'literariness' in these quintessential civic texts. Then I consider the handful of examples which we do have of political epigram preserved among the scratched graffiti, and ask what role the literary aspects of these texts play in their meaning, as documents of both cultural and political life. Fundamentally, I will argue in the next few pages, the Pompeian wall texts do provide evidence, not just of the civic attitudes and opinions of the urban populace, but of their ongoing engagement with literary forms and themes.

POETIC POLITICS

As I noted earlier, the standard format for programmata has few 'literary' pretensions. Generally speaking, they begin with the name of the candidate, written out in large letters, followed by abbreviated formulae such as *ovf* (often in ligature, standing for *oro vos faciatis*, 'I ask that you elect') or, of the candidate, *drp* (*dignus rei publicae*, 'worthy of the state'). Sometimes the names of supporters are added, along with *rog* which stands for *rogant* ('ask [*sc.* that you do this]'). But, overall, there seems to have been little scope for invention, although we do have the occasional instance where the sign painter could not resist adding his own editorial comments. This standardization of form, however, means that deviations stand out, and must have done so to the ancient viewer as well. Of course, we have no way of knowing how many people in Roman Pompeii could actually read the substance of the programmata, but it does not require much literacy to spell out a name, or to perceive the difference between standard formulae with words abbreviated to a single letter and longer, more particular statements which use words written out in full. As always with Pompeian wall writing, it is necessary to imagine a wide variety of 'readers', including some who did not read at all but might engage with a lettered sign solely as a visual experience. On the other hand, there were clearly those in Pompeii who could not only read the walls but also wrote on them, and could have appreciated the different approaches which the sign painters took to their work.

Some of the instances of poetic form in programmata, however, do not seem to offer much more information than what we already have about the use of literary language and style in street politics. A programma found near the Porta di Nola asks support for Rustius Verus for aedile, a fairly low-level magistracy responsible for the upkeep of roads and public buildings. The aedileship was significant, however, because the post was the first step towards greater public office, including membership in the legislative body which governed the city, the *ordo decurionum*, and the possibility of higher elected posts.²² To its bare statement of support (*Rustium Verum aed. V. A. S. P. P.*), the sign adds the senarius *Augusto feliciter aediles sic decet* ('For Augustus with good fortune; thus it is appropriate for the aediles': *CIL* 4. 427). We find the first two words elsewhere in Pompeii (e.g. 4. 528, 3460) and it probably originates as one of the cheers which might greet the Emperor on a public occasion.²³ Since senarii, perhaps even this senarius, could well have been chanted at the same time, the incorporation of it into the programma supporting Rustius is not surprising, as it links his hoped-for election not just with the Emperor but also a festive event.

Of course, since they admit so many substitutions of short for long and vice versa, senarii are slippery and can sometimes be seen where they are probably not. One famous poster supports Marcus Cerrinius Vatia for aedile, adding *alter amat alter | amatur ego fastidi | qui fastidit amat* ('one person loves (him), another is loved (by him); I couldn't stand (him);²⁴ the one who disliked (him) loves (him)': 4. 346). The editors of *CIL* see a senarius in the first two lines. Here, the political significance of the text on its own is not clear, and in fact, its diction—*amare* is not found commonly in political contexts, and it is nowhere else found in Pompeii to describe a candidate²⁵—makes it

²² Castrén (1975) 62–7.

²³ Benefiel (2004) 349–67.

²⁴ Previous critics have interpreted *fastidi* in line 2 as a shortened form of *fastidio* ('I hate': e.g. Geist and Krenkel (1960) 56; Staccioli (1992) 158. Yet to my mind it is more likely—and makes better sense—if it is shortened from *fastidii*, that is, the perfect tense of the same verb ('I hated'). If this is correct, the final line functions as an explanation rather than a critique of the earlier message: Instead of 'who loathes, loves' (the translation of Varone (2002) 51), the final line should be 'who loathed (once), loves (now)'. Thus the point is to emphasize the fact that even former enemies have been brought into Vatia's camp.

²⁵ Indeed, it is found nowhere else in the programmata at all, with one exception which (I feel) proves the rule: *CIL* 4. 7679 is an advertisement for 'Gavius' for aedile (which Gavius is unclear: see Mouritsen (1988) 136). Painted beneath the usual

seem oddly out of place as part of the programma. Especially if we are willing to understand it as a senarius, however, it may be seen as a popular epigram which has here been used to fill out the notice supporting Vatia, suggesting that he is a part of the community of affection described in the text. If it was, in fact, a well-known ‘poem’, the quotation would then be emphasizing the message, that Vatia is widely known and generally loved, by linking him to the larger world of popular speech.

Indeed, the oral element both of Pompeian street culture generally and in the composition of these notices cannot be forgotten. Another example, from the Vico di Balbo, underscores this: a sign which seeks to support A. Vettius Caprasius Felix for aedile reads *A. Vettium Caprasium Felicem aed(ilem) Balbe rogamus* (‘We ask, Balbus, for A. Vettius Caprasius Felix [*sc.* to be made] aedile’: *CIL* 4. 935i). Balbus would seem to have been amenable to the request, as two nearby notices directly record his support for the same candidate for the same office (935b, 935d); another in the vicinity asks support for a Q. Bruttius Balbus for aedile (935g). All of these texts taken together suggest that, even if they did not actually dwell in the house conventionally known as the House of Balbus (9. 2. 16), the Bruttii Balbi must have had some connection to the area. *CIL* 4. 935i, therefore, is very ‘local’ in its message. Nevertheless, the vocative in 935i seems like a small joke, especially when we realize that it is required in order to render the latter half of the notice (beginning at *Caprasium*) as a hexameter. It is not entirely clear what significance, if any, the hexameter in particular has in this sign and it is tempting to see it as simply playful, or perhaps an attempt at creating a sort of jingle like ‘all the way with LBJ’. Like this slogan in support of the presidential bid of Lyndon Johnson, however, the sign which supports Vettius Caprasius works best in an oral context. Just as the rhyme of ‘way’ and ‘J’ is not apparent in the written form of the catchphrase, so the hexameter in 935i only scans if we include

GAVIUM AED, however, is the neatly lettered sentence *Marcellus Praenestinam amat et non curatur* (‘Marcellus loves Praenestia and isn’t cared for (by her)’). It is rather doubtful that this last sentiment has anything to do with Gavius’ candidacy, although it neatly fills in the space which in traditional programmata is used to express the candidate’s qualifications and the name or names of his supporters. I would argue, then, that it is meant as something of a joke. The advertisement itself is contained in the first two words (‘Gavius for aedile’), so that, in a sense, the rest of the text is extraneous; knowing this, the sign writer has filled it in with local gossip.

the last two syllables of *aedilem*, omitted in the painted version of the text. This, along with the unusual use of the vocative and the fact of the hexameter rhythm itself, suggests that the sign is playing on the notion of its own (potential) orality. Although it inserts itself materially into a network of texts, it maintains its connections with the face-to-face verbal world of urban politics.

In these examples, then, poetic forms in programmata seem to be used to create a link between the painted text of the sign and the oral popular culture within which such metrical compositions originated. There are other instances, however, which seem to display a greater awareness of the larger 'literary' contexts which gave certain poetry particular meanings. One such text is an elaborate sign from the southern side of Insula 7. 1, in the same block as the entrance to the Stabian Baths. Although it itself has long since perished, and the publication in *CIL* does not provide measurements or a line drawing, the wording alone suggests that the painter and its sponsor wished to make it stand out from the other programmata around it. The sign seeks support for Marcus Epidius Sabinus for duovir, on the grounds that he is worthy of the republic (*dignum rei publicae*), displays honesty (*probitatem*), serves as a protector of the colony (*defensorem coloniae*), and enjoys the support of the magistrate Suedius Clemens as well as the entire town council (*ex sententia Suedi Clementis sancti iudicis consensus ordinis*: *CIL* 4. 768). Further support is offered in the final line of the inscription, in which it is declared, *Sabinus dissignator cum plausu facit* ('Sabinus the "organizer" elects [M. Epidius Sabinus] with applause'). A *dissignator* is a low-level official, whose duties might include assigning seats in the theatre.²⁶ It is appropriate, therefore, that not only does Sabinus support his relative's candidacy 'with applause', but that he expresses his support in a senarius, the quintessential meter of comic plays.²⁷ Because, as we know, the senarius was also a common poetic form for popular political songs and chants, its use here makes a connection, between the institution in which Sabinus enjoys his authority as a dissignator and the civic arena in which he presently wishes to exert influence.

This last example indicates the extent to which there can be some self-consciousness in the programmata's usage of certain metrical structures: while in some cases the senarius may simply echo its

²⁶ OLD, *dissignator* 1a; cf. Plautus, *Poen.* 19.

²⁷ Pointed out by Bücheler, *CLE* 39.

popularity as a rhythm for street poems, in this instance we see it being used to recall its more institutional role in theatrical performance. There are two additional notices, however, which take that self-consciousness one step further, so that the poetic form starts to seem to have some meaning in and of itself. On the western wall of the street which runs between *Insulae* 3 and 4 in *Regio* 5, notices of support were discovered for M. Lucretius Fronto's candidacy for aedile. The sign is in many ways typical of Pompeian programmata: the candidate's name is written in large letters (14 cm high), followed in smaller writing by the office for which he is running and the people who support him—in this case, his neighbours (*[M. Luc]retium Frontonem | aed(ilem) vicini rogamus: CIL 4. 6625*).²⁸ To the right of the notice proper, however, the same painter who wrote the sign added as an embellishment a slightly wobbly elegiac couplet: *Si pudor in vita quicquam prodesse putatur | Lucretius hic Fronto dignus honore bono est* ('if modesty is thought to bring any profit in life | this man Lucretius Fronto is worthy of good position': *CIL 4. 6626*). In a similar vein, just inside the door of a house to the south of the city in *Regio* 1, we find a notice which supports C. Cuspius Pansa for aedile, again adding a slightly misconstrued couplet: *C. Cuspium Aed. Si qua verecunde viventi gloria danda est | huic iuveni debet gloria digna dari* ('C. Cuspius for Aedile: if any honour should be given to one living modestly | fitting honour ought to be given to this young man': *CIL 4. 7201*).

These two texts certainly represent the most elaborate usage of poetic form in the Pompeian programmata. But they also employ additional tropes which distinguish them from the other notices with which they shared Pompeii's street space. We can compare other advertisements found elsewhere for the same men for the same offices. *CIL 4. 6613* also recommends Marcus Lucretius Fronto for aedile (*M. Lucretium | Frontonem aed(ilem) d(ignum) r(ei) p(ublicae)*): 'M. Lucretius Fronto for aedile; [he is] worthy of the Republic', and 4. 279, amongst numerous others, supports Gaius Cuspius Pansa (*C. Cuspium Pansam | aed(ilem) d(ignum) r(ei) p(ublicae) ovf (ligature: oro vos faciatis) Saturninus | cum discentes rog(at)*): 'I ask that you make C. Cuspius Pansa aedile; [he is] worthy of the Republic; Saturninus along with the "learners" ask this'). As I have

²⁸ 'His neighbours ask for M. Lucretius Fronto for aedile'.

noted, traditional programmata often contain formulae which are so well established that many of the words can be abbreviated to their first letter—the significant parts, the words that need to be spelled out, are the name of the candidate and the names of the person or persons who are recommending him.²⁹ This is one of the features which seems to link them closely with the style of inscriptions in stone. Although anonymous recommendations, such as that for M. Lucretius Fronto just quoted, are not unusual, when endorsers do appear they are always actual persons or groups, such as the Saturninus and the ‘learners’ cited in *CIL* 4. 279. The couplets quoted here stand out from other programmata, therefore, not just in their form and the fact that they contain none of the usual formulae, but in that the role of the postulant (for lack of a better term) has been taken over by abstractions: support is demanded for Lucretius Fronto on behalf of *pudor*, while Cuspius Pansa deserves votes because he *verecunde vivens*.³⁰ There is thus a curiously elevated tone to these poetic advertisements, as they apply the language of abstract virtue to local elections and do it using the rhythms of the elegiac couplet.

Indeed, the invocation of *pudor* (‘modesty’) in the first couplet which I quoted is worth noting. It is, of course, a perfectly respectable public virtue in the Roman canon, as Robert Kaster well showed in ‘the shame of the Romans’.³¹ It is also curious, however, that we find another reference to *pudor*, in another painted poetic text located near to the findspot of *CIL* 4. 6626. In a small but richly decorated house whose door opens onto the same street (5. 4. a)—a house which may have belonged to the same M. Lucretius Fronto celebrated in 6626³²—a painting was found which depicts the story of Pero and Micon. This myth was seemingly popular among the Romans of the first

²⁹ For a discussion, see Franklin (1991) 77–98, at 84–5.

³⁰ For a discussion of the language found in programmata, see Franklin (1980) 18–21 and Chiavria (2002) 57–62.

³¹ Kaster (1997) 1–19.

³² There has long been scholarly consensus that the house belonged to M. Lucretius Fronto. This identification is based on the numerous programmata supporting him on the facade of the house and two graffiti found in the portico, one of which reads *M. Lucretius Fronto vir fortis et hon(estus)* (‘M. Lucretius Fronto is a powerful and honourable man’: *CIL* 4. 6796). Although it is true that such an identification is based on circumstantial evidence, there is no better case to be made for another owner and it does seem likely that Fronto lived somewhere in the area.

century CE:³³ a father was imprisoned and condemned to starve to death, but retained his health far beyond what his jailers thought possible; spying on one visit between him and his daughter, they discover that she has been feeding the old man on her breast milk. Works of art depicting the myth are not by any means unusual in Pompeii. We possess three paintings and two terracotta statuettes from the city which show the father–daughter pairing at the centre of the story.³⁴ The painting from the house at 5. 4. a, however, contains a unique additional element—a poem, composed in elegiac couplets and painted in white in the upper left-hand corner of the image. See Figure 2.2 for a photograph. Although partly indecipherable even at the time of excavation, the text is still reasonably clear in meaning and tone:

Quae parvis mater natis alimenta parabat
 Fortuna in patrios vertit iniqua cibos.
 Aevo dignum opus] est. Tenui cervice seniles
 asp[ice, ia]m ut venae lacte me[ante micant.
 Admoto]q(ue) simul voltu fri(c)at ipsa Miconem
 Pero: tristis inest cum pietate pudor.³⁵

The food which the mother was preparing for her little children
 hostile Fortune has turned into food for her father.

The deed is worthy for eternity. See how the old veins in the thin neck
 shine as the milk passes through.

At the same time, she herself, Pero, strokes Micon with her face
 pressed to him:

along with piety there is in her a sad modesty.

This poem-picture combination is, in itself, something of a curiosity. As I discussed in Chapter 1, poems written on paintings are not unknown, both in Pompeii and elsewhere in the Roman world. But the text on the painting of Pero and Micon is unusual, both because of its explicitly ekphrastic nature and because it is in Latin. Perhaps not

³³ Valerius Maximus (4. 4. 7) repeats the story in both Roman and Greek versions as an example of *pietas*, and notes that there was a famous painting of the scene which was often visited in Rome. Cf. Pliny the Elder, *NH* 7. 36, who also tells the story and notes that the site of the prison would in later years become that of the temple of *Pietas*.

³⁴ For a complete discussion of the ancient visual evidence, almost all of which comes from Pompeii, see Santucci (1997) 123–39.

³⁵ The text with supplements by Gigante (1979) 223–4. For the house, see Peters (1993).



Figure 2.2. Fresco of Pero and Micon from Pompeii 5. 4. a (House of M. Lucretius Fronto) with painted epigram. Photograph by Michael Larvey.

coincidentally, it also concerns a particularly Latin and Roman set of virtues, *pietas* and *pudor*. I have argued elsewhere that we must see this as an example of the ways in which female domestic virtue might be used as part of the performance of a family's honour for the community, since this painting is located just off the atrium, the most public part of the house.³⁶ The display of Pero's virtuous behaviour towards her father makes a statement about the values

³⁶ Milnor (2005), ch. 2.

prized by the owner of the house. In addition, however, we may also see how this invocation of *pudor* gives a certain ‘inscriptive’ context to the electoral advertisement painted in the street outside. Although the one maps female *pudor* onto the space of the household, and the other insists on the value of male *pudor* in the civic sphere, both texts function as advertisements for a particular form of elite virtue. Both the Pompeian painting and the election notice thus emerge from the same social milieu, in which the advertisement of *pudor* was part of claiming a certain place in Roman society.³⁷

In fact, if scholarly consensus is correct and the house at 5. 4. a was in fact owned by Marcus Lucretius Fronto—the candidate supported in *CIL* 4. 6626—there may not just be a thematic but also a material connection between the epigram on the painting and that which appeared in the street outside. That is, it seems possible that one of the impulses behind the (unusual) use of the epigram form for the election notice may have been the fact of the ekphrastic poem within the house; we may see the political epigram as a translation of both the message and the meter of the text on the painting, not just to civic space but to civic matters.³⁸ Both are representations of M. Lucretius Fronto. Moreover, the connection between the kind of self-representation commonly found in the reception rooms of the Pompeian atrium house and that seen in programmata is also clear in the notice which supports Cuspius Pansa for aedile. This sign is unusual among Pompeian election notices not just in its use of poetic form, but also in its placement: it was found on the wall of the fauces of a large and well-decorated house at 1. 7. 1, beyond the threshold where the hall meets the street, although before the door proper.³⁹ See Figure 2.3 for a photograph. In other words, it was located in the (literally) liminal space between outside and inside, between the street where programmata were commonly found and the domestic interior which was home to more controlled types of elite self-representation. Although there is no scholarly consensus about who owned this particular house, whether Cuspius Pansa himself or simply an ardent supporter, the

³⁷ Kaster (1997) 1–19.

³⁸ For a discussion of the epigram on the painting which also notes its relationship with *CIL* 4. 6626, see Tontini (1997) 141–60.

³⁹ This house is today commonly known as that of Paquius Proculus but, again, identification of house-ownership is difficult in Pompeii, and the dwelling is also sometimes known as that of Cuspius Pansa, due to the prominence of the programma supporting him in the doorway.



Figure 2.3. Programmata inside doorway of Pompeii 1. 7. 1. Photograph by author; enhanced by Sam Woolley.

placement of the programmata suggests a connection between internal and external displays of social identity.

As a vehicle for this kind of personal aggrandizement, the epigram form certainly made sense—a corollary to the, perhaps better-known, ‘scoptic’ type, the ‘panegyric’ was also well established as a mode in this type of poetry.⁴⁰ But there is an additional element in the two programmata poems which connects them with another type of epigram, namely the ekphrastic. In terms of semantics, one of the elements which stands out in both texts is the use of the demonstratives *hic* (*Lucretius hic Fronto*: 6626) and *huic* (*huic iuveni*: 7201) to refer to the candidates. It is unlikely that they are used here to indicate to the reader ‘this one (that you know)’: this is not a common usage of the demonstrative adjective in Latin, nor, closer to home, is it ever found used in this way in other programmata. Rather, the two couplets in this instance seem to be exploiting a happy ambiguity, between the person of the candidate himself and the appearance of

⁴⁰ Fitzgerald (2007) 3–4.

his name in the painted notice. That is—and this would make especially good sense if the men named lived in the neighbourhoods in which the texts were found—one way of understanding the demonstratives is in spatial terms: ‘this Lucretius Fronto’ meaning ‘the one physically nearest the text’ or, in other words, ‘the one you might well see on this very street’. In this sense, the poems are then not just representations but ‘readings’ of the candidates, explanations of how the voter should see and interpret the personae of Marcus Lucretius Fronto and Cuspius Pansa. Yet given the fact that each poem appears alongside a large painted representation of the candidate’s name, the demonstratives in the poems could also simply refer back to these, so that ‘this young man’ in *CIL* 4. 7201 signifies ‘the young man whose name appears two lines above’. The poems would then function as commentaries on the painted names; they are not simply rationales for the readers’ votes, but interpretations of the moral significance of the candidates and their candidacies—much in the same way that the epigram on Pero and Micon explains the moral significance of the accompanying mythological painting.

This way of understanding the couplets, as ‘readings’ of the candidates rather than straightforward solicitations of votes, also serves to explain their rather odd wording. Traditional programmata are generally clear in why and how they praise the individuals they promote: the reader should vote for *X* because he is a good man (*vir bonus*) or worthy of the state (*dignus rei publicae*), clearly invoking the principle that personal worthiness should translate to political success. The two couplets, however, violate that idea from the beginning, as both open with the linguistic indicator of doubt, ‘if’ (*si*). Instead of advocating, they hypothesize. Of course, there is an implied right answer to the hypothesis—that is, the voter is being asked to prove that, for instance, credit *will* be given for modest living—but the open-endedness of the introductory *si*-clause is a curiously rhetorical, or poetic, flourish. It is, in fact, a trick found in Catullus and Martial, perhaps most notably in Martial 1. 39, where a series of complimentary *si quis*-clauses (‘if there should be someone who . . .’) culminates in the final revelation that such a paragon does exist and his name is Decianus. The use of this figure in Martial’s panegyric epigram fits in well with the self-conscious cleverness which marks the genre, but its appearance in the Pompeian programmata also suggests that both he and the author(s) of the couplets were tapping into the same body of linguistic tropes.

The connection between literary epigram and those found in the programmata is also displayed in the latter's use of paradox, an extremely important aesthetic principle in all of Martial's work.⁴¹ Indeed, it is used here in the programmata almost in violation of the point which the texts are trying to make. Both couplets, it will be noted, suggest that the candidates deserve voter support because of their moral qualities, in the case of Fronto, his strong sense of *pudor*, and for Pansa, the fact that he lives 'modestly' (*verecunde*). At the same time, however, both texts also seem to lay bare the irony of attempting to translate such private virtues into political achievement. The contradiction in the Pansa text is made particularly evident in the double use of *gloria* ('glory'), which is even juxtaposed in the first instance with *verecunde viventi*: *Si qua verecunde viventi gloria danda est | huic iuveni debet gloria digna dari* ('C. Cuspius for Aedile: if any glory should be given to one living modestly | fitting glory ought to be given to this young man': *CIL* 4. 7201). The emphasis which the poem puts on *gloria* is particularly noticeable, since it is the only use of the word to be found in the Pompeian programmata.⁴² And especially when this is used to describe the hoped-for result of living with modesty, the text seems to be underscoring the paradoxes of the process it is promoting. A similar effect is visible in the poem supporting Fronto. There, the rhetorical *si*-clause wonders 'if a sense of modesty (*pudor*) is thought to bring any profit (*prodesse*) in life'. Again, we find here the contradiction inherent in advertising a sense of modesty, but the larger conflict lies in the idea that one's *pudor*—a moral virtue which, in Robert Kaster's formulation, comprises 'an internalized sense of right-doing'⁴³—is ultimately aimed at (political) gain (*prodesse*). Particularly because *pudor* was understood as a quality which distinguished the elite (Tacitus has Tiberius suggest that the poor simply can't afford it⁴⁴), the suggestion that Fronto's is calculated to improve his social standing seems as though it might carry a sting.

This is not, however, to suggest that the two poetic programmata I have discussed were not actually intended to have the effect which they pretend, namely to support the candidacies of the men they name. The ironies cited are subtle and would probably not be evident

⁴¹ Rimell (2008) 10–14.

⁴² Indeed, there is only one other use of the word anywhere in Pompeian wall writing generally, and where it appears in a quotation from Virgil.

⁴³ Kaster (1997) 5–6.

⁴⁴ At *Annals* 3. 54.

to the casual reader, although to be fair there are enough other ‘poetic’ indicators in the texts—the meter, the use of elevated diction—that an alert viewer might be looking for such literate ironies. But in general I would argue that such an aesthetics of paradox is so inherent to the epigrammatic tradition that it has simply slipped into these panegyric poems, a kind of private joke not intended to subtract from the overall message of the notices. Inherent in this statement, though, is the suggestion that the person who composed the two couplets had a sense of the traditions of the genre to which he was, in a small way, contributing. That is, the earlier examples of *senarii* in *programmata* serve primarily to connect their associated texts with the oral interactions where much of Roman political life occurred. The couplets supporting Pansa and Fronto, on the other hand, are much more conscious of themselves as part of a world which is material, written, and has a formal relationship with texts beyond the immediate context of Pompeian wall writing. This is also evident in their use of deictic words, literary turns of phrase, and verbal contrasts. The manner in which they are displayed spatially, moreover, underscores their role as representations of elite male personae by creating links with the performative decorative world of the *domus*. This in turn suggests that their construction as political epigrams is intended to translate to the material world the kind of work of creating and maintaining social relationships which was an important role of literary epigram in the Roman Empire.⁴⁵

In this context, however, we should also take into account one more text, whose style, form, and message are familiar: *aedilem Proculam cunctorum turba probavit: | hoc pudor ingenuus postulat et pietas* (‘The crowd of everyone has approved Procula as aedile | this freeborn modesty as well as duty [now] demand’: *CIL* 4. 7065). Again, the composition is an elegiac couplet; again, it seems to be endorsing a certain Proculus as aedile; again, it invokes abstract virtues (*pudor* and *pietas*) to support its endorsement. What is curious about this text, however, is that unlike the examples of electoral *programmata* cited earlier, it was not painted but rather scratched into the soft plaster of a wall. Thus, despite its elegantly formed script, it appears as the informal work of an individual, rather than a professionally painted notice. But even more curious is the fact that ‘Proculus’

⁴⁵ Fitzgerald (2007) 27–32.

here has become 'Procula'—a shift which has made scholars suspicious that this is actually a critique, of a candidate not considered manly enough for public office.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the English 'crowd' does not really do justice to *turba*, which almost always has negative force in Latin, so that 'mob' would be a better translation; *probo*, in addition, can signify 'approve' but can also mean in a negative sense 'to represent (falsely), to pass off'. What seems at first like an endorsement, thus appears on closer inspection to be criticism: the mob made a fake man into a fake magistrate. The abstract virtues then cited in the second line have the ring of sarcasm, which would trade on the language used in other programmata to praise the candidate. Here, however, *pudor ingenuus*—the adjective being especially politically pointed, designating 'modesty appropriate to a free man'—and *pietas* limp along behind the will of the crowd, representing not the cause of the election but its result, not what a candidate should have to be elected but what is attributed to him once he has won.

Part of this text's wit clearly lies in the way that it parodies the kind of poetic programmata which I have quoted. I have already noted its mocking reuse of the language of elite virtue—*pudor ingenuus* and *pietas*—but it is also noticeable that, like traditional electoral notices, this text too begins with the candidate's name and office in the accusative. In Della Corte's line drawing, moreover, those first words are set apart from the rest of the poem, so that, in the same way as in traditional programmata which open with the name painted in much larger letters than the rest of the sign, the eye is drawn to that most important part of the text. Yet the text is distinguished from real election notices not just by its mockery of the candidate but by its medium. Instead of a large, recognizable, and professionally produced programma, this text was inscribed into the plaster near the 'House of the Silver Wedding', 5. 2. 1. Thus, as much as it clearly parodies election notices, the material form of the poem creates a link with more casual graffitied texts which might be found in Pompeian streets.

Indeed, the fact that the poem contains a slur on the masculinity of the candidate indicates that the poet has taken on not only the medium but also the sensibility which coloured much popular epigram in Pompeii. 'Procula's close relationship with the *cunctorum turba* has a hint of prostitution in it, which again contrasts sharply

⁴⁶ Della Corte (1926) 145–54.

with the *pudor ingenuus* mockingly praised in the next line. And the fact that ‘Procula’ here appears scratched on a wall is also part of the message which the poem seeks to communicate, as it creates a mental link with other graffiti texts elsewhere which advertise or criticize (it is difficult to tell which) the promiscuous sexual behaviour of certain Pompeian women. This is to say that the effect of the text is not confined to what its words actually say, but is also contained in its medium. What is jarring about this text is not simply that it criticizes rather than praises a political figure, but that it has created a peculiar hybrid type of wall writing in order to do it, one which draws on the language and form of both erotic graffiti epigram and political programma. But, in a sense, it is that very hybridity which is the point of the poem—that is, its critique of the candidate turns on the fact that the political process confuses popularity and the virtues which genuinely might earn a man public office. That confusion is then reflected in the form of the poem, at once a popular epigram and a political advertisement. Like the poetic programmata which I quoted earlier, then, the poem which mocks ‘Procula’ reflects a sense not just of itself as a text written on a wall in a public space, but of the different forms which such texts could take, and the different meanings of those different forms. Despite its seeming dismissal of the opinion of the *cunctorum turba*, then, even *CIL* 4. 7065 makes a contribution to our sense of the popular poetic discourse of Pompeian public life.

POLITICAL POETICS

The epigram on ‘Procula’ cited in the previous section thus shows that the political sentiments expressed in Pompeian streets were by no means limited to those shown in the painted election notices, nor were they universally acclamatory of local politicians. It is true, however, that it is not among the programmata proper that we find expressed critique: the election notices were formulated to show support, and the way that they were generated, by hired *scriptores*, meant that they generally stayed within that mode. It is among the scratched graffiti, therefore, that we must seek further evidence of what the historical and literary sources from Rome would lead us to expect, namely popular poetry which serves as a form of protest against elite government. One representation of the way such texts

were created and experienced in the urban environment occurs in Strabo's *Geography*: an unpopular gymnasiarch in the city of Tarsus was criticized by the hexameter graffiti inscription, ἔργα νέων βουλαὶ δὲ μέσων, πορδαὶ δὲ γερόντων ('work of the young, meetings of the middle-aged, and farts of the old'). Instead of erasing the text, however, the official simply had a different tag added to the end (βρονταὶ δὲ γερόντων, or 'thunder of the old'), to which someone responded by smearing the wall of his house with excrement. The magistrate then responded in turn by observing that, if it couldn't contain its bowels, the citizen body was surely ill (Strabo, *Geography* 675; 14. 5. 14).⁴⁷ The story is particularly interesting for the (in a certain sense) dialogue it depicts between the official in power and the anonymous populace, who 'talk back' through the graffiti and other actions.

Yet the story from Strabo also demonstrates one of the difficulties with attempting to identify political statements among the ancient inscriptions which survive to us, namely that even with ancient interpretive help, it can be difficult to comprehend fully what such texts actually mean. Clearly, the gymnasiarch in this instance took 'farts of the old' as pointed and personal, although exactly why seems to require more local knowledge than we have to answer. It is thus quite likely that there are political statements on the walls of Pompeii which we, as modern scholars, are simply unable to see. For example, in the basilica—where we might well expect to find political sentiments being expressed—was found the senarius, *non est ex albo iu[de] x patre Aegyptio* ('the juror with an Egyptian father does not come from the official list': *CIL* 4. 1943).⁴⁸ Clearly part of the wit lies in the contrast between the white official tablet on which the list of jurors was inscribed and the dark skin of a person of Egyptian descent, but without more knowledge of the context it is hard to determine the exact nature of the joke. Another wall in Pompeii offers the iambic couplet *communem nummum dividendum censio est, | nam noster nummus magna(m) habet pecuniam* ('opinion is that common cash should be divided up, | for our pennies have great value (?)': *CIL* 4. 1597). Again, the text seems to relate to public affairs, and to be making some kind of joke about the use of *nummus* as the communal

⁴⁷ N. Biffi observes that the hexameter is a variation on one by Hesiod (which concludes *εὐχαὶ δὲ γερόντων*), and which we know circulated as a proverb: (2009) 308.

⁴⁸ The *album* was the list of jurors chosen by the quaestors (*aliquem albo iudicum eradere*: Suetonius, *Claud.* 16).

treasury and to identify a small, practically worthless coin. But we simply do not know enough about local governance and fiscal affairs in Pompeii to be able to explain the meaning of the verses any further.

Part of the difficulty with identifying ‘political’ sentiments in Pompeian graffiti is that civic life—as can be well seen in the programmata—seems often to have been bound up with social relationships and opinions about particular elite figures’ personal qualities. It can therefore be challenging to determine where private invective leaves off and political speech begins. Some examples of this can be seen in a group of texts from Pompeii which, as Bücheler notes (*CLE* 41), seem to be intended as poetic but whose meter is thrown off by the addition of locally significant names. Thus, *CIL* 4. 4533, found scratched on the atrium wall of 6. 14. 37, runs *G. Hadius Ventrío eques natus Romanus inter beta(m) et brassica(m)* or ‘Gaius Hadius Ventrío, knight, was born a Roman between a beet and a cabbage’. The inscription includes a senarius, from *natus* to *brassica(m)*. The significance of the vegetables is not entirely clear, although the name Ventrío (presumably derived from *venter*, ‘belly’) may be the joke, or the source of the joke;⁴⁹ the point may also be to emphasize, or mock, the fact that this ‘Hadius’ has risen to his current rank from a humble beginning. *CIL* 4. 1997, found in the street, similarly includes both a senarius and an opaque statement, *Gn. Aninius quen quisque vinculis solvet bene* (‘Gnaius Aninius whom each person will well unbind from his bonds’).⁵⁰ The sentiment is evocative, and we have some evidence that the family was a prominent one,⁵¹ but, again, without better local context we can only guess at the text’s meaning.

Finally, it is worth noting a rather butchered epigram, found written on the wall of a bedroom in 6. 13. 6, *semper M. Terentius Eudoxsus | unus supstenet amicos et tenet | et tutat, supstenet omne modu* (‘Marcus Terentius Eudoxsus alone always supports his friends; he holds and guards (them), and supports (them) in every way’: *CIL* 4. 4456). Bücheler at *CLE* 929 observes that, were we to substitute a name such as Maecenas (or some other which consists of three long syllables) for that of Eudoxsus, and replace the first *supstenet* with its

⁴⁹ Kruschwitz (2005).

⁵⁰ Bücheler also cites 1949 and 4239, which seem to have less ‘political’ significance.

⁵¹ *CIL* 4. 1096, painted outside the amphitheatre, records the fact that *permissu Aedilium Gn. Aninius Fortunatus occup(at)* (‘by the permission of the aediles, Gn. Aninius Fortunatus holds (a seat for the show?)’).

synonym *sustentat*, we would be left with a serviceable elegiac couplet. Although this particular Terentius does not appear in the programmata, the family was an important one in the city and active in local elections (see *CIL* 4. 3370; 6629; 6678; 808; 697). Of course, the objection might be raised that there is even less overtly ‘political’ about this epigram than the obscure statements quoted earlier; M. Terentius’ popularity with his friends is hardly a matter of public concern. Bücheler’s suggestion, however, of Maecenas as the original name in the text—even though there is nothing to prove the hypothesis that Augustus’ friend and adviser was the subject of the initial version of the poem—points to the blurry boundary between social and political influence under the Roman Empire. The couplet is celebrating Terentius Eudoxsus’ virtue as an *amicus*, whose care for his friends, and their desire to please him in return, was part of the engine which made the Roman state run.⁵² But perhaps more significantly, the format of the text is appropriate for its evocation of the ways that such friendships could be mutually beneficial. Such a flattering epigram could have well been used as a way for a poorer but poetically minded man to repay an aristocratic friend for his kindness and protection. Whatever name was originally in the poem on which 4456 was based, whoever wrote it on the wall was clearly aware of, and attempting on some level to participate in, the world of literary exchange which gave the social realm a material and aesthetic dimension.

I argued earlier that some programmata use metrical patterns as a way of invoking popular songs which we know circulated through the Roman urban population. In the political graffiti which I have just discussed, we can also see this process in action, as individuals scratch down on an available wall surface metrical tags and phrases which they probably heard, or at least could have heard, on the city’s streets. Thus, for example, when a wall announces *iudicis Aug(usti) feliciter* (‘hooray for the decisions of the Emperor!’: *CIL* 4. 3525), it is repeating, and inviting the reader to repeat, the cheers which might greet the emperor on a public occasion.⁵³ Part of the ‘political poetics’ of Pompeian graffiti, therefore, may be found in the ways that they represent and attempt to engage with the oral metrical forms of public life in the streets of the ancient city. In the epigram which

⁵² L. R. Taylor (1949) 7–9; for a recent overview, see Verboven (2011) 404–21.

⁵³ Benefiel (2004) 349–67.

praises M. Terentius Eudoxsus, however, we see a text which shows an awareness of both oral and material forms which goes beyond simple repetition of street tags or jokes. It exists as a representation of and response to epigram's role as part of the system of *beneficia* which blurred the line between personal and public business in the Roman world. Interestingly, unlike the other texts quoted, it was not found in the street or part of the 'public' rooms of the house, but inscribed onto the wall of the more private space of a bedroom.⁵⁴ Its use of all three of Eudoxsus' names in defiance of the metrical pattern, however, suggests a more formal, less intimate, relationship between the author and the subject of his panegyric.

Epigram, as is well established, had both an oral and a material dimension in Roman culture. The same can certainly be said of the genre evoked in another Pompeian graffito, this time from the outside wall of the 'House of the Tragic Poet': *futebatur inquam futuebatur civium Romanorum atractis pedibus cunus, in qua nule aliae veces erant nisissei dulcissime et pissimae* ('Fucked, I say, fucked with legs drawn back was the cunt of the citizens of Rome, during which there was no sound except moans sweet and respectful': *CIL* 4. 1261). Although it is not clear whether the text is meant to be triumphant—'the Romans got fucked!'—or rueful—'the Romans certainly got fucked', the connection with political polemic is clear.⁵⁵ This is especially true since scholars have seen in the text a parody of a famous passage from one of Cicero's *Verrines*, in which a man under torture refuses to make any sound except to say 'I am a Roman citizen' (*civis Romanus sum*: *Verr.* 2. 5. 162).⁵⁶ Whether or not we believe this allusion exists, the parody in the graffito of formal public oratory is clear, not just in the evocation of 'Roman citizens' and the virtuous adjective *pius* ('respectful'), but in the rhetorical insertion of *inquam* and repetition of *futuebatur*. The inclusion of *inquam* ('I say'), in particular, is not simply a rhetorical commonplace, but underscores the paradox of the inscription. When an orator such as Cicero uses the word, he calls attention to himself and his role as a speaker;⁵⁷ not only is the graffito written rather than spoken, but

⁵⁴ Although it should be noted that bedrooms in the ancient Pompeian atrium house were not private in the modern sense of the term: see Riggsby (1997) 36–56.

⁵⁵ As discussed in Cugusi (1985) 23–9.

⁵⁶ van Buren (1942/3) 195–6; Gigante (1979) 160–1.

⁵⁷ As e.g. in Cicero, *Phillipics* 12. 2, *decepti, decepti inquam sumus, patres conscripti* ('we were deceived, deceived I say, conscript fathers!').

its anonymous author is not actually present to claim responsibility for the opinion expressed. This would seem to be one of the advantages of transforming an oral opinion about politics into a written graffito. On the other hand, the fact that it is written down suggests that the writer—even if he was not specifically citing Cicero’s *Verrines*—knew that political speeches could well become material documents.

On a different level, the text’s use of the idea of the body politic is also worth noting, as it attributes to all Roman citizens a single *cunus*. It is not uncommon in ancient authors to find the image of the polity as a *corpus*. It appears perhaps most famously in the second book of Livy’s *AUC*, where Menenius Agrippa compares the Senate to the state’s belly and the people to its hands and feet (2. 32. 8–12).⁵⁸ Closer to home, in many ways, is the fact that in the story from Strabo with which I opened this section, the unpopular gymnasiarch responded to the excrement spattered on his wall by noting that, if it could not control its bowels, the citizen body was clearly sick. There, part of Strabo’s point seems to be to contrast the crudeness of the act and the higher-level wit of the gymnasiarch’s reply: the production of the original scatological epigram (‘farts of the old’) and the production of the shit on the wall are the acts of a crude populace, but each time the aristocratic magistrate manages to provide a more refined significance. The image as it is used in the Pompeian graffito is less scatological than unapologetically obscene, sounding something like Catullus in its feminization of the masculine *Romanorum* to the suggestion of rape in *attractis pedibus*.⁵⁹ Of course, this use of the sexualized (female) body for the state was also well established in Roman political thought, even extending to the idea of rape as political triumph.⁶⁰ The image of the body politic, then, along with the possible reference to Cicero’s *Verrines* and the text’s rhetorical style, would seem to connect the graffito to political discourse on a grander scale.

Of course, the obscenity of the text marks its distance from the high-level Ciceronian oratory which it mocks. Especially given the high value which elite speakers placed on propriety and the correct choice of words, the crudity of expression in *CIL* 4. 1261 seems to be a deliberate strike against the norms of the genre. On the other hand, it is clear that

⁵⁸ Cf. Cicero, *de Off.* 3. 2; Seneca, *de Ira* 2. 31.

⁵⁹ Catullus uses the phrase at 15. 18 in this context.

⁶⁰ On which, see Joshel (1992) 112–30.

embodied, sexual and/or scatological language was one of the most popular discursive modes for those who inscribed Pompeian walls.⁶¹ In the past, this has been understood as simply a natural aspect of popular urban culture in the ancient world, which, it is true, did have a more comfortable relationship with corporeal experiences (such as sex and death) than we do in the modern day. At the same time, however, it is worth noting that in certain instances such as the oratorical parody discussed earlier, the adoption of obscene language seems to be a deliberate choice, a way that the text distinguishes itself from the standard expressive modes of elite genres and elite contexts. Instead of seeing scurrilous graffiti as simply the product of immature or rebellious minds, it is worth considering obscenity as a representational strategy, one which deliberately translates experiences and opinions into a particular popular idiom.

Another example of this may be seen in a text inscribed in Pompeii's basilica, where it shared wall space with many other graffiti, ranging from quotations of Virgil's *Aeneid* (*CIL* 4. 1841) to straightforward announcements like *Narcissus fellator maximus* ('Narcissus is the biggest cocksucker': *CIL* 4. 1825 with p. 212). Like the *futurebatur* inscription discussed earlier, the three-line inscription contains a clear reference to public life and has been seen to draw on the tradition of political polemic (*CIL* 4. 1939).⁶² See Figure 2.4 for a line drawing of the text.

<<Pum[pei]s>>⁶³ fueere quondam Vibii opulentissimi;
 non ideo tenuerunt in manu sceptrum pro mutunio
 itidem quod tu factitas cottidie in manu penem tenes
 Once there were the very wealthy Vibii [in Pompeii?];
 they did not hold in their hand a sceptre on behalf of ????
 in the same way that you do daily (when you) hold your penis in
 your hand.

The text seems to be an attempt at trochaic septenarii, an appropriately comic meter for an apparently parodic text. The name Vibii was actually written above the space between *quondam* and *opulentissimi*,

⁶¹ For an overview, see Williams (2010) 291–302.

⁶² van Buren (1942/3) 28–9.

⁶³ This is the reading of Varone (2002) 93–4, who notes that the first word seems to have been erased in antiquity. Other editors have suggested other supplements, such as *Romai*, *reguli*, *reges*, or perhaps a name in the vocative.

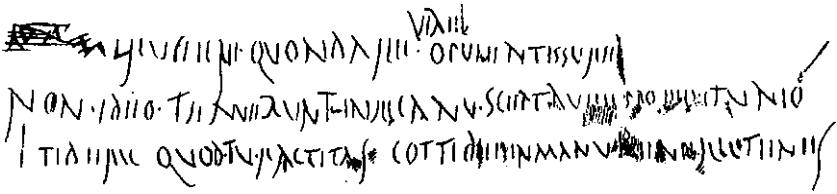


Figure 2.4. Line drawing of CIL 4.1939, from CIL vol. 4.

suggesting that it may have been an afterthought (but probably not a later addition since the hand is clearly the same as the rest of the text). The Vibii were once upon a time a prominent family in Pompeii, although they disappear from the programmata in the middle of the first century CE.⁶⁴ Exactly what *mutunio* signifies is an open question, even if, as Bücheler suggests, it should be read as *mutunium*.⁶⁵

Like the *futuebatur* inscription, this text too draws on the imagery of the body, and uses the obscene image of masturbation to underscore the actions of the Vibii, who (apparently) did not handle their power with the relaxed attitude that ‘you’ display towards your penis. Whether or not this was true, we cannot answer—although, as I have noted, the Vibii do seem to have fallen on hard times by the year of the eruption, so their appearance here as a kind of exemplum (‘once there were . . .’) makes a certain sense. But I would again call attention to the language of the body as it appears here. Particularly noteworthy is the second-person singular in the final line, underscored by *tu* and the endings of *factitas* and *tenes*. Although it is just possible that the missing first word was a name in the vocative, a short ‘e’ before *fueere* would do some violence to the meter,⁶⁶ and the final letter of the first word does appear in an early transcript of the text to be an ‘s’.⁶⁷ If no addressee was indicated in the first line of the text, the

⁶⁴ Franklin (2001) 192–3; on the history of the family, see Castrén (1975) 240–1.

⁶⁵ Bücheler, *CLE*, no. 231. It is not clear to me why critics have been so eager to make *mutunio* into an obscene slang word (e.g. ‘they did not hold in their hands the sceptre like a member’: Varone (2002) 93). It seems to me more likely that the writer would have maintained an elevated tone until he reached the final line, thus to underscore the shift in language and make the joke more pointed. Especially given the place of the graffito (the basilica), I wonder whether we might not see *Mutunio* as a name: *pro Muntunio* thus meaning ‘on behalf of Mutunius’.

⁶⁶ Although a vocative in *-i* would be possible.

⁶⁷ Although the original text is preserved in the Naples Museum, it is now badly worn; a transcription was made by excavators when it was first discovered, on which can be seen traces of letters which have subsequently disappeared: Varone (2002) 93 n. 150.

third line has a remarkable directness as it speaks to the reader: the 'you' who masturbates so frequently is 'us', or rather, 'me'. In contrast with the lofty esteem in which the Vibii are held, the reader of the poem is imagined in much earthier terms, part of a community much more familiar with the penis than the instruments of power. In this sense, the poem does not just draw a contrast between the tropes and traditions of politics and the tropes and traditions of sexuality; it also applies those tropes and traditions to different categories of people, the vanished, idealized Vibii on the one hand and the present, unsuspecting graffiti-reader on the other.

This too, I would argue, is a kind of politics, one which is found not just in what the graffiti says about public life, but in how it imagines a particular kind of readership. The masturbating masses, who contrast with the 'very wealthy' Vibii and their *sceptrum*, are at once described and (in a certain sense) created by the poem itself. By speaking to the reader in a language with which he is imagined to be familiar (very familiar, as indicated in the frequentative *factitas* and *cottidie*), the poem participates in making such corporeal terms the lingua franca of Pompeian walls. But my point here is not so much to insist on a distinction between the language of politics and the cheerful eroticism and obscenity of the scratched graffiti. Instead, I would argue that texts like the 'Vibii' poem show the extent to which the graffiti themselves are aware of different kinds of public discourse, and use them in sometimes surprisingly subtle ways. In addition, the fact of the written graffiti text—its placement on the wall of the basilica—gives it at least an imagined popular audience far greater than if it were simply an oral statement. Written, it can reach out beyond the immediate moment of its composition and draw into its readership all those who happened to linger and read in the side niches of the basilica. I do not, of course, mean to imply that everyone could or did read this small scratched poem, especially in a space where there was much competition for the reader's attention. The audience which any given graffiti imagines for itself is certainly not a fact but a fantasy. On the other hand, that fantasy is (I would argue) significant, insofar as it offers us a window onto one aspect of graffiti authorship: to whom the writer thought he was speaking, and what relationship he created with that reader by means of his inscribed text. In the sense, then, that the text functioned as a means of negotiating that relationship—between the writer and the community of readers—we may characterize it as a part of 'public life'.

In this sense, then, we may characterize these types of political inscriptions as 'local' on two levels: first, in the fact that they refer to public figures and events whose significance was best appreciated by those living within Pompeii or its immediate environs; but second, in the way that they create a sense of immediacy to the living city, of inserting themselves into the oral political exchanges of the urban environment. Because of this desire to remain close to the 'rhythms' of the street, poetic graffiti of this type prefer the conversational meters of the senarius or septenarius. Curiously, when we move beyond the realm of local public affairs to the handful of poetic texts which make reference to imperial governance on a larger scale, the preferred meter changes as well. There are, of course, a number of inscriptions which simply praise the *iudicia Augusti* ('judgements of the Augustus'), a phrase which, it has been argued, refers to the Emperor Nero's decision to repeal a ban on gladiatorial games at Pompeii.⁶⁸ Other than these, however, there is little evidence from the streets of the ancient city that Pompeians cared much about the Emperor or his activities, and certainly nothing to suggest the existence of the kind of poetic representations of popular opinion about imperial politics which are preserved in the pages of Suetonius and others. Curiously, the one graffito which fits those descriptions, and which was known before the publication of the inscriptions I am going to discuss, was not from the urban environment but a countryside villa in Boscotrecase, long identified as having belonged to Agrippa Postumus, grandson of the Emperor Augustus.⁶⁹ It is a pentameter, which may mock the supposedly divine parentage of the founder of the Julio-Claudian dynasty: *Caesaris Augusti femina mater erat* ('the mother of Caesar Augustus was a woman': *CIL* 4. 6893). Both the location and the meter of the fragment differentiate it from the urban graffiti discussed earlier.⁷⁰

Within the walls of Pompeii, however, there was almost no evidence of poetic responses to imperial personages or activities until the publication in 1974 of a remarkable set of inscriptions from the (so-called) House of Julius Polybius, a large and clearly important

⁶⁸ Franklin (2001) 119–25; cf. Magaldi (1936) 75–100.

⁶⁹ First identified as such by Rostovtzeff (1998) 552–3. The villa was not systematically excavated, but a good archaeological description can be found in Della Corte, in *Notizie degli scavi* (1922) 459–78.

⁷⁰ For a discussion of this fragment, see Morgan (2010) 362–3.

residence off the Via dell'Abbondanza (9. 13. 1–3).⁷¹ Based on a seal found in a chest in the peristyle, the house seems to have belonged to Gaius Julius Phillipus, who may have been a freedman of Julius Polybius, representatives of a family sprung perhaps many years previously from freedmen of the imperial family. Four different texts, in what seem to be four different hands, were found scratched into a painted wall in a room just off the tiny portico which served the house as a cooking area (see Figure 2.5 for a map of the house, showing the findspot of the graffiti). We do not know what this room was used for: Penelope Allison, in her analysis of the archaeological finds in the house, concludes it was 'multi-purpose' and 'utilitarian', although she does note the rather pretty (if simple) fourth-style painting which decorated its walls.⁷² The four graffiti texts were written in quite literate hand(s) below the central roundel in whose centre (to judge from the other paintings in the room) was painted a still life or animal figure. The ornamental border of the panel frames the texts on the left and right sides. At some time after the excavation of the house, the section of wall containing the inscriptions was removed to Pompeii's central antiquarium, where it can be seen today (see Plate 1 for a photograph of the plaster fragment).

The graffiti make a curious grouping. First is a line of verse, apparently trying to be hexameter, although the writer has included an extra syllable between the fourth and the fifth foot: *Cernite Thebaides modo tales sed Bromios regia Menas* ('See the Theban women, now such but Bacchus (and?) the royal Maenad . . .'). The reference would seem to be on some level to Euripides' *Bacchae*, in which the god seduces the women of Thebes including Agave, the former queen of the city (and thus perhaps the 'royal Maenad'). This is followed by a text which reads, *munera Poppaea misit Veneri sanctissimae | berullum helencumque; unio mixtus erat* ('Poppaea sent as gifts to most sacred Venus a beryl and a pearl earring; a single pearl had been mixed in'), and one which remarks, *Caesar ut ad Venerem venet sanctissimam ut tui te vexere pedes caelestes Auguste | millia milliorum ponderis auri fuit* ('When Caesar came to most sacred Venus, when your heavenly feet carried you, Augustus, there were thousands of thousands of pounds of gold'). These sentences have been understood

⁷¹ All texts reported and discussed in Giordano (1974) 21–8. On the house, see de Franciscis (1988) 15–36.

⁷² <<http://www.stoa.org/projects/ph/rooms?houseid=15#809>>.

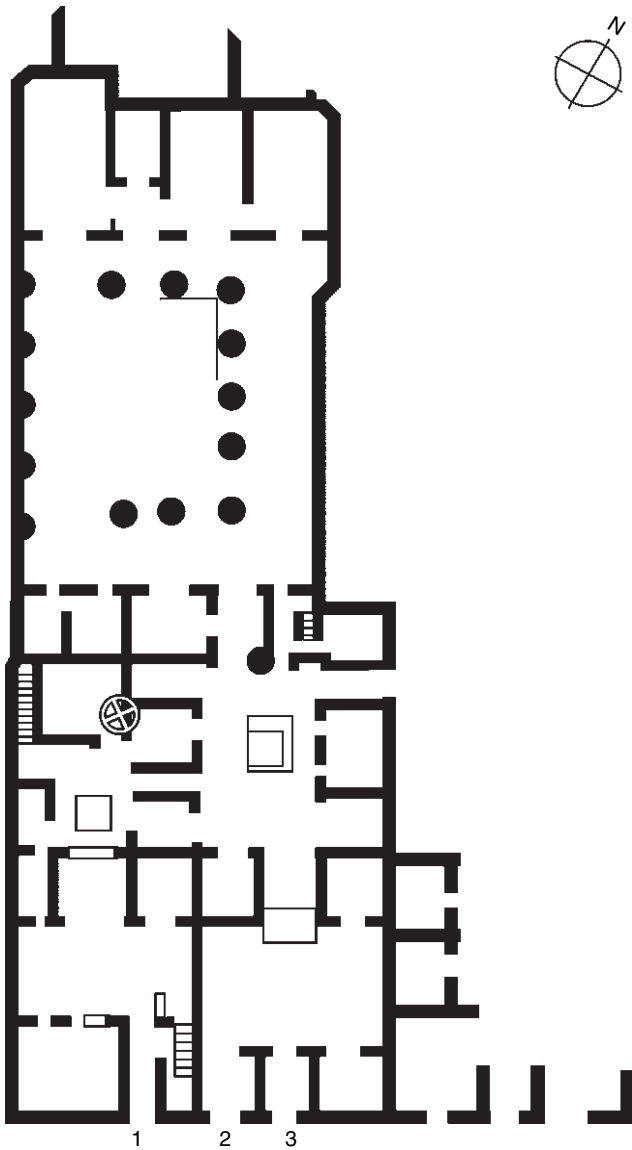


Figure 2.5. Plan of 9. 13. 1-3 (House of Julius Polybius), showing findspot of graffiti texts. Redrawn by Sam Woolley.

as reporting on a trip which Nero and Poppaea made to the Bay of Naples in 64 CE, when (scholars hypothesize) they also visited Pompeii and made gifts to the temple there.⁷³ An analysis of the metrical structure of these two inscriptions shows that although they too are not well formed, they seem to have been composed as couplets. The first of the two runs into difficulty with the final ‘a’ in ‘Poppaea’, which would need to be scanned long for the hexameter to continue, but the second inscription marches along in good form until the end of *sanctissimam* elides with *ut* to lengthen the last syllable in the fifth foot. Each text, however, ends with a reasonable pentameter—although the elision over the caesura boundary between *helencumque* and *unio* is somewhat unorthodox (but cf. Catullus 101. 4). Thus, in the same way that the writer attempted a hexameter meter for the first inscription, the writers of the second and third seem to have tried to shape their texts as epigrams.

In addition to the metrical form, the ‘literary’ ambition of these texts is also indicated by their styles of expression. For instance, the Poppaea inscription contains two transliterated Greek words, *berulum* and *helencum*. The fact that the writer may not have been a Greek speaker for whom such words would come naturally is indicated by the transference of the aspiration in the second word: the Greek is ἑλεγχος, or in Latin *elenchus*, but the author has written *helencum*. Like the first text, with its *Thebaides*, *Bromios*, and *Menas*, the inscription concerning Poppaea seems to be attempting a cultured linguistic mode. In the second inscription, there is less evidence of Greek influence, but there still seems to be an attempt at high style in *ut tui te vexere pedes caelestes*: ‘when your heavenly feet carried you’, especially as an expansion on ‘came’ (*venet*), is so overblown it almost looks like a parody. There also seems to be a verbal play on *Venerem venet*, something very common in Latin poets, in part because of the popular suggestion that the name of the goddess was etymologically derived from the verb.⁷⁴ Given the overtly political bent of these later two inscriptions, it is tempting to look back at the first—with its Theban women, Bacchus, and ‘royal Maenad’—and see a reference to Nero and his entourage. Given the Emperor’s well-established theatrical ambitions, and his perceived lack of traditional Roman

⁷³ This is the interpretation of Franklin (2001) 124–5.

⁷⁴ As is described in Cicero, *De Nat. Deo*. 2. 69, although the idea is later dismissed in the same text (3. 62). For a discussion, see Hinds (2006).

masculinity, the comparison to Bacchus seems appropriate. Thus, these three inscriptions seem to represent a genuine fragment of a public poetic discourse, a written record of the lively oral world of Roman politics.

If, however, we see these texts as some of only a few poetic political graffiti in Pompeii—and the only ones which deal with imperial governance—the question necessarily arises: what are they doing inside, and well inside, such a large and well-appointed house? As with many spaces in Pompeii, part of the answer probably lies in the fact that at the time of the eruption the dwelling was not being used for the purpose for which it was originally designed: in some rooms, third- or fourth-style wall painting had been covered over with utilitarian white plaster, and substantial amounts of building material was found in some of the entry rooms. This may be because the house had been damaged in the earthquake of 62 CE and was being rebuilt in 79 CE,⁷⁵ although there is other evidence which suggests further disruption in occupancy patterns at a time closer to the eruption.⁷⁶ At any rate, this ‘house’ does not seem to have been functioning as a standard elite dwelling when it was destroyed. In this context it is worth noting that the penetration of graffiti into the House of Julius Polybius is matched by a similar penetration by other forms of public texts: within the house are also found several painted programmata, supporting the local Julii for various political offices. The presence of election notices inside the house is extremely unusual, and may indicate that it had been transformed, if only partially, into a more ‘public’ space like a business. On the other hand, the fact that the election notices inside the house concentrate on supporting the Julii, in combination with the seal belonging to Julius Phillipus which was found in the peristyle, suggest that the space was still in the control of some member of the family. That family, moreover, had some kind of connection, even if only a distant ancestral one, with the Julian side of the Julio-Claudians. Like the villa of Agrippa Postumus which provided the political pentameter cited earlier, this location too seems to have had a link to the imperial family.

Of course, it should not be forgotten that, when Pompeii was destroyed in 79, the dynasty of the Julio-Claudians had been brought to a rather precipitous and ignominious end more than ten years

⁷⁵ De Franciscis (1988) 32.

⁷⁶ Penelope Allison, <<http://www.stoa.org/projects/ph/house?id=15>>.

earlier with the suicide of Nero in 68 CE. The inscriptions in the House of Julius Polybius, therefore, are either quite old—in which case we might wish to consider the fact of their preservation in the face of the replastering of several other rooms in the vicinity—or they post-date the death and condemnation of the imperial couple they describe. This point is underscored by the final inscription on this wall, which, at first glance, seems very different from the ones above it, both in content and tone. In large and clearly incised letters, the wall records *Pro salutem reditum et victoria C. Iuli Philippi votum h[ic] fecit Laribus P. Cornelius Felix et Vitalis Cuspi* ('For the safety, return, and victory of C. Iulius Philippus, P. Cornelius Felix and Vitalis the slave of Cuspius made a vow here to the Lares'). This last inscription is both the easiest and the hardest to explain of the group. A few yards away, in the opposite corner of the kitchen portico, is located a large shrine to the Lares (or household gods); C. Iulius Philippus seems to have lived at some point in the house; the two men who made the vow were both associated with families (the Cornelii and the Cusprii) who might well have had connections with the aristocratic Julii who owned the house.⁷⁷ Moreover, it does not seem strange that Felix and Vitalis should want their act of devotion to be recorded and recognized. Such an act of loyalty to the aristocratic master might well be rewarded if he did indeed return safely from whatever journey he had undertaken. On the other hand, this graffito is unusual in that it records the men who, I think we may assume, were its authors, both of whom must have been visitors to the house, and one of whom was a slave, while the other a freedman.

Although we cannot say for certain in what order the inscriptions were written, it does seem likely that the lowest on the wall (Felix and Vitalis' vow) was the latest. If this was the case, it is particularly striking how different this final text is from those which preceded it. First, it is clearly written in the mode of more formal instances of public writing, often found in ancient temples or on votive objects, where documenting a vow is part of the sacred act. This may be seen not just in the content of the inscription, which is squarely prosaic and contains neither the stylized language nor metrical pretensions of

⁷⁷ As is argued by Franklin (2001) 144–5. Note, however, that the inscription was not found, as he says, 'on the Lararium', but underneath the other inscriptions in the space to the north of the courtyard, as can be seen in the photographs published by Giordano (1974).

those above it, but also in the way that it is written.⁷⁸ The writing of the vow is far larger and clearer than that of the epigrams above it, and some of its letter formations are quite different from the Old Roman Cursive or ‘literary’ hand used for the other texts on the wall. Most notably, the writer of the vow uses the capital ‘E’ seen in more formal inscriptions in stone, rather than the double-stroke cursive ‘e’ found in the hands above, and he also includes interpuncts between words as a stonemason would. It is possible that these elements simply reflect a different level of literacy on the part of the last writer—Hermeros in Petronius’ *Satyricon* famously remarks that he can only read *lapidarias litteras* (‘stone letters’: *Sat.* 58. 7)—but the coincidence between the import of the text and its form is noteworthy. As is seen elsewhere in Pompeii,⁷⁹ the inscriber of the vow seems deliberately to be echoing more formal inscriptive practices. This, in addition to the text’s earnest tone, underscores the difference between the vow and the ‘epigrams’ above.

At the same time, however, two of those other inscriptions—in fact, the two immediately above that of Felix and Vitalis—concern the dedicatory activities of the Emperor Nero and his wife Poppaea. Whether or not the imperial couple actually performed the deeds described in the texts, there is still an association created between the objects they offer to Venus and the humble vow offered by the freedman and the slave. In the same way, then, that we might see the vow’s imitation of capital letter forms as a way of appropriating the authority of formal inscriptions in stone, we can also imagine it as appropriating the authority of the imperial dedications to support the offering by Felix and Vitalis. Thus, while it is not entirely clear why the initial, metrical inscriptions were written in this particular place, there is a thematic link between them and the final record of the vow. Moreover, I would argue that, by including their text with the others

⁷⁸ See Figure 2.6 for a detail of the inscription, showing the different hands used for different texts.

⁷⁹ As in *CIL* 4. 1885, *Ti Caesare Tertio Germanico Caesare Iter Cos/Ti Caesare/Tert/Tertio Germanico*. The graffito writer here is clearly echoing an inscription in stone from the year 18 CE (when Tiberius was consul for the third time and Drusus for second; cf. *CIL* 11. 3303). But more importantly for my purposes is that, in contrast with many of the inscriptions around it (e.g. *CIL* 4. 1884, which was written a few inches above and to the left of it, in cursive), it employs clear and careful block capitals, as well as the interpuncts to demark words from each other which would have appeared in the ‘official’ version of the inscription.



Figure 2.6. Detail of plaster fragment showing graffiti from the House of Julius Polybius (9. 13. 1–3). Pompeii *deposito*. Photograph by author.

on the wall, Felix and Vitalis are able to appropriate not just the idea of the imperial couple's activities and the richness of their gifts, but also the weight of the discourse which the epigrams represent. That is, the earlier graffiti echo the forms and content of 'literature', which has been marshalled to speak to civic life. The vow does not present itself in such stylized terms, but it too is participating in the textualization of political and social relations. In the same way that the writtenness of the prior inscriptions is underscored by their learned references and elevated language, which in turn becomes one base of their authority and meaning, so too does the text by Felix and Vitalis use content and form to echo the written power of inscriptions in stone.

In this chapter, I have attempted to examine how 'literature' functioned as a part of civic discourse in Pompeian graffiti. As I noted at the outset, elite literary and historical sources from the Roman Empire lead us to believe that parodic popular epigram was

rife in the urban environment. While this might have been true in the capital city, there is far less evidence of it in the wall-writing evidence from Pompeii. At the same time, however, there was clearly an awareness of and interest in the ways that literary forms and themes could be used to make political points, from the popularism expressed in *senarii* to the advertisement of elite virtue through 'ekphrastic' epigram. It is clear that there is an oral element to many of these texts, which surely reflects the spoken, face-to-face nature of much of civic life in the ancient city. Yet there is also a sense not just of textuality, but of the meaning and power of textuality, to be seen in many of the Pompeian wall writings. This is especially evident in the set of texts from the House of Julius Polybius, in which political epigrams in literary language are paired with a text (Felix and Vitalis' vow) whose roots are squarely and self-consciously in formal public inscription. Thus we are left with the impression of both deliberate continuity and deliberate contrast between the activities of graffiti writers and those whose participation in public writing—such as *programmaturum scriptores* and stonecutters—was more sanctioned by the elite. While, as I argued in Chapter 1, graffiti in the Roman city do not seem to have come with the same sense of transgression against cultural norms which they embody in the present day, nevertheless the privacy and informality of their voices were an important part of their meaning. Thus, questions of authority, authorship, and appropriation, which I will take up again in Chapter 3 from a more canonical literary perspective, necessarily frame any discussion of their role in political discourse.

Authorship, Appropriation, Authenticity

Who wrote Pompeian graffiti? This is perhaps the most vexed question in the history of scholarship on the ancient Campanian wall-writings. One popular theory attributes them to ‘schoolboys from highly respectable families’;¹ by contrast, Augustus Mau and Francis Kelsey famously remarked that the texts do not represent ‘the best elements of society’.² Part of the problem arises from the equally difficult one of what level of literacy we can or should attribute to the ancient urban population, since if we knew who had the ability to write, we might better understand who could do so on walls. On the other hand, if we knew who scratched the Pompeian graffiti texts, we would have a better understanding of ancient urban literacy. This cycle of ignorance is not unique to graffiti studies in classics, but in this we are not helped (as we are in regard to other social historical questions) by our manuscript sources, whose understanding of graffiti as an unmediated representation of the *vox populi* is not especially well supported by the actual evidence on Pompeian walls (see Chapter 2). Particularly within a genre whose interest in naming, oneself and others, is so pervasive, frustration at our inability to answer this most basic of questions about ancient graffiti authors is understandable. Yet the question of authorial identity is not simply a historical but also a literary one. As will be discussed at the beginning of Chapter 4, many of those who inscribed Pompeian walls had a powerful, specific, and self-conscious sense of themselves as writers. This means, in turn, that they must be seen as heirs to the complex questions about authorial self-representation and identity which had long been a part of Roman literature, and were especially important in one of the genres most

¹ Harris (1989) 260.

² Mau and Kelsey (1899) 492.

influential on Pompeian literary graffiti, Roman elegy. In this sense, it is important to ask not just who Pompeian graffiti writers actually were, but who they thought they were; to what extent did they understand themselves as participating in acts of authorship, and how did prevailing cultural models of authorship affect the way they represented themselves in writing?

In antiquity as well as more modern times the dominant idea of authorship was one which privileged the individual practitioner and his/her intimate connection with the writings attached to his/her name. Although this was before copyright protections, there was still clearly a powerful sense at least in the Roman world that an author had a proprietary right to his/her own writings—even though that right was not infrequently challenged. One might suppose that the fact that there was no mechanical reproduction of texts would have made their words more difficult to steal, but Cicero rather famously complains about unauthorized copies made of his *De Finibus* after he had sent the manuscript to his friend Atticus but before it was formally published (*ad Att.* 13. 21a. 1–2).³ Pliny the younger fleshes out the difficulty with such activities when he warns his friend Octavius about certain of his poems which, in advance of the circulation of the full book, ‘have broken out of confinement against your wishes. If you don’t drag them back into the group, at some point they will, like runaway slaves, find someone else to call owner’ (*invito te claustra sua refregerunt. Hos nisi retrahis in corpus, quandoque ut erroneos aliquem cuius dicantur inveniunt*: 2. 10. 3). This threat of literary theft is perhaps most fully explored by Martial, who seems to have struggled with plagiarism (indeed, it is he who gave us the word), especially in the early days of his poetic career.⁴ Thus, for instance, in 1. 53, Martial accuses a certain Fidentinus of having published Martial’s poems in a book along with a single one of his own—which verse, Martial claims, is so bad that it appears in the group like ‘a black crow . . . among Ledeian swans’ (*niger . . . Ledaeos . . . covus olores*: 1. 53. 7–8). Indeed, he goes on, Martial’s work is so distinctively his that ‘there is no need for a witness or a judge for my books’, since ‘your own page opposes you and says “you are a thief”’ (*indice non opus est nostris nec iudice libris: stat contra dicitque tibi tua pagina ‘fur es’*: 1. 53. 11–12).

³ Starr (1987) 213–23 does an excellent job of exploring the mechanics (and difficulties) of publication and distribution of Roman books.

⁴ Fitzgerald, (2007) 93–7.

In short, the ancient sense of what an author was and what (proprietary) relationship he/she had to the words of his/her text seems to have been similar to that in the modern day.⁵ Yet we should not let this fact blind us to the possible existence of other models of authorship, both then and now. Contemporary critical theory has underscored the ways in which the author is merely a construction of the text, far less important, at least according to Barthes, in determining meaning than its reader;⁶ Michel Foucault insists that an author is no more or less than a means of 'separating [texts] one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence'. He also suggests that, like many other things in his formulations, the status of the author is historically contingent: 'Although, since the eighteenth century, the author has played the role of the regulator of the fictive, a role quite characteristic of our era of industrial and bourgeois society, of individualism and private property, still, given the historical modifications that are taking place, it does not seem necessary that the author function remain constant in form, complexity, and even in existence.'⁷ Indeed, scholarship on the history of copyright and the nature of authorship has underscored the 'collective, corporate, or collaborative element in writing' from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance.⁸ Thus, St Bonaventure, writing in the 1270's, defines an author as someone who 'writes both his own work and others' but with his own work in principal place adding others' for purposes of confirmation'. He prefaces his definition, moreover, by noting that there are four different ways of making a book, involving greater or lesser indebtedness to the works of others and only one of which involves the 'author' as described.⁹

In antiquity too, although the standard model was the one just described, there existed other, competing ideas of how one might occupy the position of author. Kathryn Gutzwiller has made a compelling case for seeing the actions of Hellenistic anthologizers of epigram—most notably Meleager—as both deliberate and creative, simultaneously obeying and refining aesthetic rules to make a new literary object (the anthology) out of carefully selected fragments of

⁵ For an excellent summary of contemporary scholarship on this issue, see Bennett (2005) 55–71.

⁶ Barthes (1977) 142–8.

⁷ Foucault (1980) 113–38, at 119.

⁸ Woodmansee (1994) 15–28; 17. Cf. Eisenstein (1980) 120–1.

⁹ Minnis (1984) 94–5.

others' work. As Gutzwiller points out, in antiquity the replication of predecessors' work was seen as a useful, even important, technique in artistic creation. Aristotle traces the origins of poetry to imitation, a uniquely human activity (*Poet.* 1448b); Quintilian remarks that 'a large part of art is contained in imitation', since 'it is useful to follow those things which were well discovered [by others]' (*Neque enim dubitari potest quin artis pars magna contineatur imitatione . . . ea bene inventa sunt utile sequi: Inst.* 10. 2. 1).¹⁰ In keeping with this philosophy, we know that students were taught to write by copying out texts, which might either be fragments from canonical literature or a composition by the teacher himself.¹¹ Moreover, Roman rhetoric had a highly developed appreciation for *sententiae*, 'maxims' or 'gnomic epigrams'. Although *sententiae* in the broad sense could be any short or pithy expression in a text, it is clear that it was acceptable—even desirable—for speakers to quote them from elsewhere. Regarding the use of maxims in famous orators like Cicero, Quintilian explains that quotations, from poetry in particular, not only show the learning of the speaker, and give pleasure to the audience, but also serve to support the orator's point by calling on the authority of earlier writers, *velut quibusdam testimonii* ('as if by a kind of witness testimony': *Inst.* 1. 8. 12).

In short, although among the cultural elite originality was an important aspect of authorship, and there was a strong sense of proprietary ownership by an author over his texts, it is clear that there also existed what we might call a culture of appropriation in Hellenistic and Roman literate activities. On a grand scale, this manifests itself as the widespread use of allusion and intertextuality in late republican and early imperial poetry.¹² Thus, for instance,

¹⁰ Gutzwiller (1998) 227–36.

¹¹ We have significant material evidence of this practice from Graeco-Roman Egypt, such as, for instance, the tablet from a cemetery on which the teacher has written a hexameter line ('Begin, good hand, beautiful letters, and a straight line') along with the admonition 'now, you imitate it!'. The student has dutifully copied out below both verse and final command. Cited and discussed in Crihiore (1996), no. 136 and (2001), 133. Although this example appears to represent the schoolmaster's own poetic composition, we also have numerous instances of phrases from canonical poets being used as copy-models. Much of our evidence for this relates to education in Greek, so that we know Menander was especially popular, but Latin poets too (especially 'antique' ones such as Ennius and Terence) were mined for pithy and memorable phrases: Bonner (1977) 174–7.

¹² On which, see Conte (1986); Conte and Barchiesi (1989) 81–114.

Ovid's story of Narcissus and Echo is full of verbal 'echoes' of previous poetry, most notably Catullus' marriage hymn, a manifestation of (to use Stephen Hinds's term) the poet's 'allusive self-annotation'.¹³ There is clearly a difference between this and the outright plagiarism about which Martial complains so vociferously. At the same time, however, it is worth noting that some of the epigrammist's objections are to activities which could be seen, in different hands perhaps, as artistic borrowing—as when he decries someone's 'mixing' of his own verses with those borrowed from Martial.¹⁴ This, along with Martial's other expressed concerns about literary theft, should suggest to us that at the level of the street, where popular circulation of poetry happened, appropriation—even wholesale appropriation—might be considered an authorial act.¹⁵ In this chapter, then, I discuss the ways in which originality and quotation function within the corpus of Pompeian graffiti by looking at three distinct genres of wall texts: the collection of epigrams, represented by the texts of 'Tiburtinus' and an anonymous author from Pompeii's basilica; fragments of personal letters, which allude to and sometimes directly quote standardized models of the genre; and popular *sententiae*, which are commonly represented and manipulated by Pompeian wall writers. I hope that what will emerge in the course of this discussion is a more nuanced sense of how the ancient graffitists understood their own acts of authorship, as both drawing on and contributing to the literary discourse of Roman culture.

TIBURTINUS AND 'THE AUTHOR EFFECT'

As noted, one of the critical theorists who has attacked the modern concept of 'author' was Michel Foucault, who notes that part of constructing and consolidating that concept was to limit the kind of texts which were imagined to manifest authorship: 'If we wish to publish the complete works of Nietzsche, for example, where do we

¹³ Hinds (1998) 6–8.

¹⁴ *Quid, stulte, nostris versibus tuos misces?* ('why, idiot, do you mix your verses with ours?': Martial 10. 100. 1).

¹⁵ For a discussion of how authorship of this kind worked in the context of the Renaissance commonplace book—which was composed out of quotations, translations, and manipulations of earlier poets' work—see M. W. Thomas (1994) 401–15.

draw the line? . . . what if, in a notebook filled with aphorisms, we find a reference, a reminder of an appointment, an address, or a laundry bill, should this be included?¹⁶ Antiquity has not left us Virgil's laundry bills, but the general point is that certain kinds of texts seem automatically to fall outside our definition of authorship. Foucault himself goes on to note, 'the name of an author is a variable that accompanies only certain texts to the exclusion of others: a private letter may have a signatory, but it does not have an author; a contract can have an underwriter, but not an author; and, similarly, an anonymous poster attached to a wall may have a writer, but he cannot be an author'.¹⁷ Foucault here steers rather carefully clear of the primary object of this study, namely graffiti—his 'anonymous poster' here would seem to describe something closer to an advertisement or political placard. But by bringing his ideas about authorship to bear on 'non-literary' writing generally, and anonymous public writing in particular, he does underscore some of the most difficult and interesting questions about graffiti both ancient and modern: is there a difference, and if so what is it, between a small scratched love poem and a billboard promoting a political candidate? To what extent is the person who wrote that love poem on a wall engaging in an act which is self-consciously authorial? If we can 'prove' in graffiti writers some kind of intent to author, is that a sufficient pretext to consider their writings in the same category as other more canonically-authored texts?

As a way of approaching these questions, it is instructive to consider the only Pompeian graffiti writer to have achieved authorial status in the minds and work of classical scholars, an individual by the name of Loreius Tiburtinus. Tiburtinus is responsible for an epigram—or possibly a whole set of them—which was discovered in 1883 outside the west gate leading to Pompeii's small theatre. This structure itself is generally dated to the early part of the first century BCE, and the wall on which the poems were written was actually covered over when the adjacent building (the 'gladiatorial school') was built, probably in the mid-first century CE.¹⁸ Thus, unusually for Pompeian graffiti, we may say with confidence that the poems pre-date the destruction of the city by at least thirty or forty years. On the

¹⁶ Foucault (1980) 118.

¹⁷ Foucault (1980) 124.

¹⁸ A. Sogliano, in *Notizie degli scavi* (1883) 52.

basis of certain lexicographical and stylistic features, moreover, they are usually judged to be ‘pre-neoteric’ and dated to the mid-60s BCE.¹⁹ Originally published by Antonio Sogliano in the *Notizie degli scavi* of 1883,²⁰ the verses have traditionally been separated into eight or nine texts, but, as I will discuss, there is good evidence to suggest that they should be seen as at least eleven separate poems or fragments of poems.²¹ All appear to be epigrams, in elegiac couplets, although only three (the first, second, and sixth) are well enough preserved to reconstruct.

Poem 1 = *CIL* 4. 4966

Quid f]it? vi me oculi posquam deduxstis in ignem
 cur i]mbrem²² vestreis largificatis geneis
 ust]o non possunt lacrumae restinguere flamam
 hui]c os incendunt tabificantque animum.

What is happening? Eyes, after you have brought me by force
 into the fire,
 why do you pour rain down my cheeks?
 Tears are not able to put out the flame for a man burned,
 but for him they fire up his face and melt his soul.

Poem 2 = *CIL* 4. 4967

ardent]es veicinei incendia participantur,
 Idalia]m flammam tradere utei liceat.

Neighbours, when burning, share in the fire;
 it should be permitted to hand over the Mother’s (?) fire for use.

¹⁹ Bücheler (1883) 474–6 places the poems between Sulla and Cicero.

²⁰ *Notizie degli scavi* (1883) (52–3).

²¹ See Plates 2–5 for photographs of the plaster fragment, now in the Naples Archaeological Museum.

²² I follow here the text of Courtney (1993) 79–81, who replaces Bücheler’s *porr]o* in line 3 with *ust]o* and *hae]c* in line 4 with *hui]c*. Autopsy also confirms Courtney’s astonishingly (since he had not seen the original) insightful suggestion of *cur i]mbrem* for Bücheler’s *no]n ob vim*: there is a break in the plaster which partly obscures the short angled stroke of the left side of ‘r’. They can, however, be seen under strong light and in digital photographs. It then becomes clear that what had been taken as the right hand stroke of a ‘v’ is actually the left hand stroke of an ‘e’ (with the former ‘i’ forming the right stroke). Once these two letters are established, moreover, it becomes additionally clear that what the original readers of the text thought was a narrow and damaged ‘o’ to the right of an ‘n’ at the beginning of that line is probably the rightmost stroke of an ‘m’.

Poem 3 = *CIL* 4. 4968

...]bus per vic[.a]morem
 ...]etur dei[.]stost
 ...]cios[.
 ...]huc[.]t

Poem 4 = *CIL* 4. 4969

...]n ore d[.
]sumat aut ea va[.
]sumpti opus est a[.
]udam aut ei[.]dai[.

Poem 5 = *CIL* 4. 4970

...]habere aiunt eum[. . .]que locare
 ...]vi[. . .]um[.]deo condere uti liceat

Poem 6 = *CIL* 4. 4971

sei quid amor valeat nostei, sei te hominem scis,
 commiseresce mei, da veniam ut veniam.

If you know what strength love has, if you know yourself to be
 human,
 pity me, give me leave that I might come.

Poem 7 = *CIL* 4. 4971

flos veneris mihi de[
 The flower of Venus to me . . .

Poem 8 = *CIL* 4. 4972

caesia sei n[.
 sei parvom p[.

Poem 9 = *CIL* 4. 4972

es bibe lude[.
 nec semper[.

Poem 10 = *CIL* 4. 4973

solus amare v[.
 multa opus sunt s[.

Poem 11 = *CIL* 4. 4973

quod nescire dare[.

Poems 1–5 are written in a vertical list on one side of the plaster fragment on which the texts are all preserved; Poems 6–7 are a second group to the bottom right of that collection; Poems 8–11 comprise a third vertical list to the right of group two. Two further words appear,

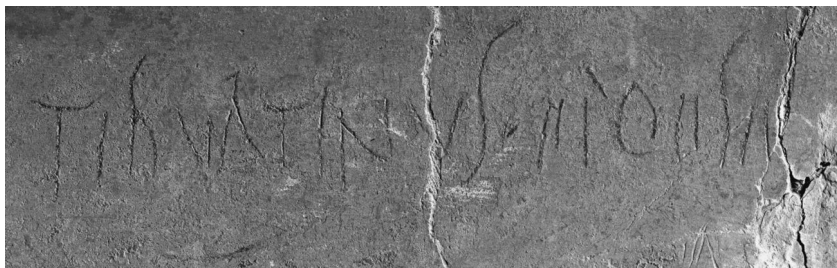


Figure 3.1. Detail of plaster fragment showing Tiburtinus' signature, reading *Tiburtinus epoese*. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. Photograph by Luciano Pedicini, enhanced by Sam Woolley.

written in larger letters beside Poem 1 and extending over (at some distance above) the top of groups 2 and 3: *Tiburtinus epoese*.²³

Scholarly work on Tiburtinus in the twentieth century was severely hampered by a problem which has bedevilled Pompeian graffiti studies generally, namely the inability of critics to gain access to the material fragments housed in the Naples Archaeological Museum. D. O. Ross, whose 1969 article is perhaps the definitive work on Tiburtinus in the last century, claims that the plaster fragment containing the texts had been lost,²⁴ although the previous year H. Solin had published a very grainy photograph of Poems 1–5 in an article for *Epigraphica*.²⁵ If the fragment was lost in 1969, it was subsequently found, but no scholar appears to have studied it closely, nor have any further images been published. Thus, most critics after the original excavators have relied on the line drawing provided by A. Mau in *CIL* and the testimony of others—not bad tools, but inaccurate in some important ways. First, the standard descriptions and Mau's copy are vague in depicting the spatial relationships between the texts and thus obscure the fact that the poems appear in three different groups (as just described). Moreover, although Ross rightly notes the accuracy of Sogliano's original division of the poems, most others (including Mau in *CIL*) treat Poems 6–7 as a single unit, where even a cursory examination of the plaster shows that 7 begins considerably to the left and below the left-hand margin of Poem 6. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, no scholar seems to have noticed that the poems in my

²³ See Figure 3.1 for a photograph.

²⁴ Ross (1969a) 127–42, at 130.

²⁵ Solin (1968) 105–25.

group 3 (8–11) are, rather than two texts of four and three lines respectively, three couplets and a single floating line. This is shown by the fact that between the couplets (and before the final line) is a small hatch mark in the left margin which serves to differentiate the texts from one another, a way of dividing up the pairs of verses which does not rely on spacing as in groups 1 and 2.²⁶

Tiburtinus' status as an author has been explored and confirmed by a number of different scholars over the years, from Bücheler through Mau in *CIL* to Courtney, who included him in his 1993 *Fragmentary Latin Poets* along with other partially-preserved luminaries like C. Asinius Pollio and Varro Atacinus.²⁷ Indeed, the connection of Tiburtinus with other early Latin epigrammists like Aedituus, Licinus,

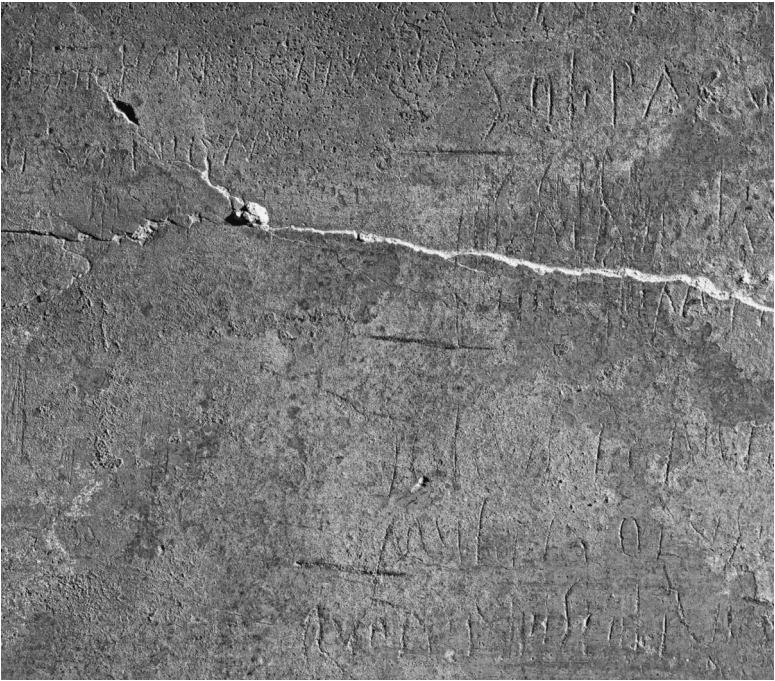


Figure 3.2. Detail of plaster fragment showing hatch marks separating Tiburtinus' epigrams 8–11. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. Photograph by Luciano Pedicini, enhanced by Sam Woolley.

²⁶ See Figure 3.2 for a photograph.

²⁷ Courtney (1993) 79–81.

and Catulus—who themselves were clearly influenced by Hellenistic poetry—has long been accepted.²⁸ In the 1920s, M. Della Corte went so far as to try to provide a biography for the poet, using two programmata to identify a particular house along the Via dell'Abbondanza as belonging to his family and finding in one of the house's frescoes a portrait of him in the guise of a priest of Isis.²⁹ Della Corte's identification of the house has subsequently been strongly questioned, and his association of Tiburtinus with the cult of Isis never really gained much currency. His efforts nonetheless contributed the *nomen* Loreius to the poet's identity—an attribution for which there is very little evidence³⁰—and a persistent idea that there must be a historical personality behind the enigmatic name.

It is clear, however, that the desire to see Tiburtinus as both a real person and as an author has been strongly influenced by his 'signature', *Tiburtinus epoese*, the words by which he notionally claims ownership of the text(s) inscribed on the theatre wall. Courtney, for instance, after citing the signatory practices of more canonical writers, notes, 'Tiburtinus too, though he chooses a humble medium, has an artistic pride in his work, whereas most writers of graffiti prefer anonymity'.³¹ This assertion is not, in fact, strictly true. There is certainly a tradition in Hellenistic and early imperial Latin poetry of what are called *sphragis* poems (or passages in longer poems), after the so-called 'seal of Theognis' in which the poet sets his name on the text as a guarantee of its stability and authenticity.³² These moments

²⁸ For a comprehensive analysis of how the Tiburtinus poems relate to the literary scene of the mid-1st century BCE, see Tandoi (1981) 133–75. On the basis of both metrical and stylistic evidence, Tandoi argues that the Tiburtinus poems illustrate the ways in which epigram poetry of this time—as more famously written by Lutatius Catulus and his circle—marks a significant break with the more 'lyric' Alexandrian style of epigram which previously held sway over the literary scene. This break included turning more towards daily life and the comic poets for inspiration. Thus, Tandoi not only sees a direct and important connection between the poems of Tiburtinus and the literary scene of the early 1st century BCE, he also argues for a close connection between the activities of poets in the Italian countryside and those in Rome proper.

²⁹ Della Corte (1928) 88–9.

³⁰ Della Corte associated the *nomen* Loreius with the cognomen Tiburtinus on the basis of several programmata outside the house at 2. 2. 2, some of which address a certain Loreius and some of which refer to a Tiburtinus. It is important to recognize, however, that the two names appear nowhere together, and their connection with one another, as well as with the house, is entirely conjectural. Della Corte (1932) 3–5.

³¹ Courtney (1993) 80.

³² On the *sphragis* tradition, see Kranz (1961) 3–124.

in the work of more canonical authors do tend to be a little less bald than the simple statement by Tiburtinus, although Cicero (*de Div.* 2. 111) offers the curious and unverifiable fact that Ennius included an acrostic in one of his works which read *Q. Ennius fecit*. At the same time, however, Pompeii is littered with graffiti which consist solely of names, although it is true that we have no way of knowing whether these are actually the names of the writers. More to the point, though, Pompeian graffiti writers often seem to take some pride in providing the reader with a name or names to identify with the person behind the text, declaring ‘so-and-so writes/wrote (this)’ (e.g. *CIL* 4. 1841 *scribit Narcissus*; 1934, *scribit Samannara*; 2993a, *L. Livius Severus scribit*; 2395, *scribet Sabinus*; 4925, *Anteros hoc scripsit*; 5007, *haec omnia scripsit Zosimus*). Again, we have no way of knowing if these names are genuine, nicknames, pseudonyms, or some combination of all of these—but my point is that the desire to use a name to ‘authorize’ the act of graffiti writing is by no means unique to Tiburtinus.

Of course, one thing which distinguishes Tiburtinus’ claim is his use of the transliterated Greek word *epoese*. Transliteration is not itself unusual in Pompeian graffiti, but this is the only use of the word in the corpus, a circumstance which contributes to the fact that we simply do not know what it means here. *ποιέω* can, of course, signify literary composition³³—it is ultimately the source of the English word ‘poet’—but it can also mean simply ‘made’. Is Tiburtinus then claiming that he composed the verses, or simply that he wrote them on the wall? Complicating matters is the fact that the verb is commonly used in the signatures of the painters and potters of red-and-black figure vases from classical Greece to claim ‘authorship’.³⁴ Even if we are willing to ignore the distance in time and country between these men and Tiburtinus, however, is the parallel with the painters (which might push us closer to considering it as a claim of composition) or the potters (which might signify material construction, i.e. the act of writing)? We do have certain evidence from Greece—also from the visual arts—that signatures were sometimes copied along

³³ LSJ *ποιέω* A.I. 4.a.

³⁴ The classic study of this phenomenon is Kelin (1887). The fact that both painters and potters seem to have used *poio* but painters alone used *egrapshen* has been the source of much controversy and confusion: Rouet (2001) 28–9.

with the works to which they were attached.³⁵ Tiburtinus' claim of authorship thus may originally not have needed to distinguish between composition and writing because it appeared in a context where the reference would be clear, e.g. a book roll (where readers would naturally assume the actual lettering was that of a copyist). On the other hand, again apropos of the visual arts, Katherine Dunbabin has observed, 'With very rare exceptions, signatures on Roman works (in any medium) give the names of those who produced the signed work itself, not an earlier model on which it was based.'³⁶ Our assessment of Tiburtinus' use of *epoese* depends to a certain extent on whether we see him as operating within a Roman or Greek, and verbal or material, artistic tradition.

Parallel to the question of exactly what Tiburtinus is claiming in his signature is one which has exercised critics more, namely whether the authorial assertion should be seen as relating solely to the first poem or to the others as well. David Ross first suggested that, based on what he saw as stylistic and thematic differences between the first poem and the ones which followed it, we should imagine at least two authors to have been involved in the creation of the collection: Tiburtinus, who composed the first epigram, and a follower, who wrote the second in response to the first and then carried on to create the complete series. Subsequent critics have disagreed strongly with Ross's argument, in part because he based it on the supposed presence of Hellenistic features in Tiburtinus' first poem and their lack in the ones which follow. This is a difficult case to make, given the state of preservation of most of those texts, and, for the second poem at least, Gigante argues compellingly that there are indeed some thematic parallels for it in the epigrams of Callimachus.³⁷ Antonio Varone follows Gigante and also argues against Ross, concluding definitively, '[Tiburtinus] should be credited with the whole group of compositions . . . [T]he verses and fragments of some of the inscriptions, under careful inspection, seem to reveal a common compositional situation and are joined together by a structural and narrative logic which could even be seen as unitary'.³⁸

³⁵ Andrew Stewart cites a marble copy of a lost bronze original from 4th-century BCE Delphi, where the epigram which appeared with the original is reproduced, along with the signature of Lysippos, on the copy: (1990) 187.

³⁶ Dunbabin (1999) 272 n.16.

³⁷ Gigante (1979) 85–6.

³⁸ Varone (2002) 105.

Of course, Foucault would argue that the perception of unity among the poems is both a cause and an effect of the attribution of authorship to Tiburtinus: we see the poems as a group and want to imagine a single controlling intelligence behind them; correspondingly, the fact of the authorial signature makes us more inclined to see the poems as a group. On the other hand, especially if we believe, along with almost every scholar who has worked on the poems, that Tiburtinus was familiar with collections of Hellenistic epigrams, he must also have been familiar with the more complex, collaborative, version of authorship attributed to poets like Meleager by Katherine Gutzwiller (discussed in Ch. 1). This is an aesthetic which does not prioritize original composition per se but rather artfulness and variation in the arrangement of one's own and others' artistic work. Indeed, even if we see Tiburtinus as also working within the tradition of Roman visual arts, a similar predisposition towards clever reproduction over 'originality' may be at work. To quote Katherine Dunbabin again, 'it is characteristic of the Roman attitude towards art that works in other media too are sometimes signed by those who in modern parlance would be considered copyists: what was admired was precisely the skill in reproducing, and often varying or adapting, well-known originals'.³⁹ Moreover, there is evidence from elsewhere in the corpus of Pompeian graffiti that writers could and did sometimes have a playful attitude towards authorship and claims thereof. For instance, *CIL* 4. 4008 is a poem which begins with the line *amat qui scribet, pedicatur qui leget* ('The one who writes loves; the one who reads is fucked')⁴⁰ and concludes with the 'signature', *scribit pedicator Septumius* ('Septumius the fucker writes [this]')—a joke, in part, which specifies the nature of the writer's 'loving' and clarifies who will be fucking the reader. Similarly, *CIL* 4. 1520 is a couplet with an erotic theme signed by 'Venus Fisica Pompeiana', so that Pompeii's own goddess of bodily love is made to claim authorship of a poem about bodily love.

In short, modern ideas about the nature and role of a literary author have caused critics to see Tiburtinus' supposed activities on the wall of Pompeii's small theatre as akin to those of (for instance) Ovid when he composed the *Amores*: an individual artist who uses his unique talent to create a new and original work of literature which

³⁹ Dunbabin (1999) 271–2.

⁴⁰ A different, longer version of this poem is discussed in Ch. 1.

comes from, and therefore belongs to, him alone. Yet when we see the graffiti writer as closer to a different tradition, which also includes the aesthetic of *variatio* prized in collections of Hellenistic epigram and the practice of pastiche esteemed in the Roman visual arts, we may also understand that Tiburtinus is playing with the reader's expectations and assumptions about the author of a literary text. The ambiguities in his signature—whether it means he wrote one poem or all of them, whether he is claiming to have composed them or is merely repeating others' words—may be seen as deliberate, an invocation of 'the author effect' in a context which automatically raises questions about its stability. Tiburtinus' claim of authorship of the collection of inscriptions on the small theatre wall provokes more than it answers questions about literary identity, authority, and authenticity.

In fact, although no critic thus far has compared them, I would argue that the closest parallel to Tiburtinus' wall-writing activities near the small theatre is a set of graffiti texts from the basilica in Pompeii's Forum.⁴¹ It is instructive to compare the two collections. The basilica group begins with four lines written closely together (*CIL* 4. 1893–4):

Surda sit oranti tua janua, laxa ferenti:
 audiat exclusi verba receptus [amans.
 Janitor ad dantis vigilet, si pulsat [ina]nis
 surdus in obductam somniet usque seram.

Deaf let your doors be to one begging, relaxed for the one bringing gifts:
 Let the lover inside hear the words of him left on the doorstep.
 The doorkeeper should be awake for benefactors, but if someone knocks
 empty-handed,
 Deaf let the keeper sleep on the locked door bolt.

Next, after a small space, is another couplet:

Quid pote tan durum saxo aut quid mollius unda
 Dura tamen molli saxa cavantur aqua.
 But what is so hard as stone or what is softer than liquid?
 Nevertheless hard stones are hollowed out by soft water.

⁴¹ See Plate 6 for a photograph of the plaster fragment, now in the Naples Archaeological Museum.

Then another vertical space and:

ubi perna cocta est si convivae apponitur
non gustat pernam lingit ollam aut caccabum.

When the ham has been cooked, if it is placed before the guest,
he doesn't taste the ham [but] licks the pot and pan.

And finally:

quisquis amat calidis non debet fontibus uti
nam nemo flammis ustus amare potest.

Whoever loves should not enjoy hot springs,
for no one who has been burned is able to love flames.

Like Tiburtinus' efforts, all of the basilica texts appear to have been written by the same person—the 's', 'e', 'a', and 'm/n' formations are all similar, although there's some variation even within a single couplet. But this kind of semi-cursive writing (which, parenthetically, would seem to place the writer at the high end of the educational spectrum) is fairly standardized across Pompeii, so it is difficult to be sure that this is a single hand (see Figure 3.3 for a line drawing of the first two couplets from *CIL*). What is more certain, however, is that they are not by the same 'author'. We can say this because the first, four-line, epigram is actually a set of two quotations from two different texts known from the Latin literary canon: the first two lines appear in Ovid's *Amores*, 1. 8. 77–8, and the second couplet is drawn from Propertius, 4. 5. 47–8. Of course, there is a neat connection between the lines from the two poets in the repetition of *surdus* ('deaf') at the beginning of the first and fourth lines. The adjective is comparatively rare, and it is likely that its presence and placement in each set of verses was one of the factors which made the association

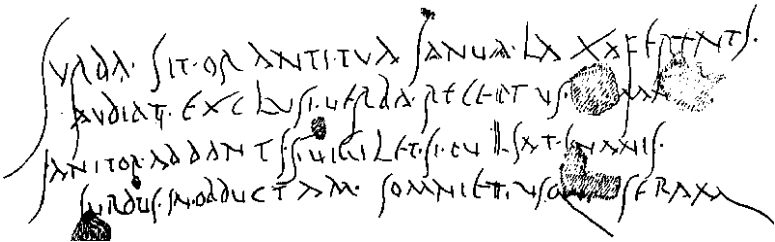


Figure 3.3. Line drawing of *CIL* 4. 1893–4, from *CIL* vol. 4.

between them in the writer's mind. At the same time, however, the association is not simply mechanical, as the message of the two couplets is also the same: admit only the rich and generous, exclude the poor and needy. Considering that the poem was found inscribed near the main entrance to the basilica, it is thus possible to read it as a rather pointed statement about the process and politics of Roman public life.

It is curious, moreover, that the image represented in each couplet is that of the 'locked-out lover', a traditional trope in Latin lyric poetry which imagines the unlucky suitor as shut out of his mistress's house and forced to sleep on her doorstep.⁴² The poet is always imagined as this poor and heartsick victim of a beloved who gives her attention to boyfriends with greater wealth. Indeed, much of canonical elegy is spent attempting (in vain) to convince the mercenary *puella* that the gift of poetry is of greater value than diamonds. These two couplets, then, both are and are not representative of elegiac discourse: they employ one of the most paradigmatic images of the genre, yet offer 'advice' which is in direct contradiction to elegy's traditional set of values. Indeed, an examination of the original poetic context of the two couplets quoted in the graffito reveals that they were both clearly meant, in the first instance, ironically: both Propertius 4.5 and *Amores* 1. 8 are texts in which the poet imagines advice given to his mistress by a *lena* or bawd, who is attempting to convince the young woman that she needs to seek a boyfriend who will support her better than a poverty-stricken versifier. The first two couplets, then, are actually quotations of quotations, statements which are—in the original context—subsequently cursed as evil and wrong by the irritated poet. This is to say that what the graffito communicates to the reader depends strongly on how much he or she knows of the original elegiac context. Anyone who understood the tropes of the genre, and/or could recognize the source of the quotations, would see the irony. Taken at face value, however, the lines seem to insist on the exclusion of the poor man by the mercenary 'voice' of the basilica.

In a sense, then, the joke of the first, four-line poem in the group turns on the reader's ability to recognize the difference between the original, 'authorized' version of the couplets and their appearance on

⁴² The *locus classicus* for a discussion of the trope is Copley (1956).

the wall of the basilica. Indeed, the fact that the original context of both is a moment in which the poet's subjective perspective fades and the text is taken over by another (albeit fictional) voice would seem to point towards a meta-meta-poetic joke: whose poem is this really, the canonical poets'? The invading *lena*'s? Or does it 'really' belong to the anonymous person who has taken the lines and put them together on the basilica wall? This, I would argue, is a particular kind of graffiti authorship, but one which is very different from that claimed by scholars for Tiburtinus. Rather than stabilizing and giving meaning to the poem by referring back to a particular individual subjectivity, here the fact of an author has the reverse effect: it illustrates the ways in which an 'other' person may assert his or her ownership over a set of words in order to reuse them to his or her own purposes. It is significant, moreover, that the basilica author does not provide a name for him- or herself to substitute for 'Ovid' or 'Propertius'. Anonymity here is in fact a style of authorship, one which allows the original creators to continue to stand behind their words and connect them to the wider world of literary discourse.

The power of this anonymous authorship continues to be demonstrated if we look at the rest of the collection from the basilica wall. Below the second couplet, the one taken from Propertius, is inscribed another quotation (*CIL* 4. 1895):

Quid pote tan durum saxo aut quid mollius unda
Dura tamen molli saxa cavantur aqua.

But what is so hard as stone or what is softer than liquid?
Nevertheless hard stones are hollowed out by soft water.

It is worth noting that an examination of the plaster fragment from the basilica wall (now housed in the Naples Archaeological Museum) reveals something not noted in *CIL*: another instance of the first three words of this couplet—*quid pote tan*—inscribed immediately to the left of the first four-line epigram (see Figure 3.4 for a photograph). The writer apparently changed his/her mind about the placement of this text, perhaps because he/she would not have had space to finish the line without interfering with those already written on the wall. The choice both to respect the prior inscription, and to place the new couplet directly underneath the earlier ones, contributes to the sense that the texts were meant to be understood as a group. The lines are from Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* (1. 475–6) this time, although he has *quid*



Figure 3.4. Plaster fragment with *quid pote tan* written to the left of *CIL* 4. 1893–4. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. Photograph by Luciano Pedicini, enhanced by Sam Woolley.

magis est saxo durum, quid mollius unda in the hexameter. In contrast with the earlier verses, however, these lines contain a reassuring message, an exhortation to the man shut out, perhaps by the unyielding doors: persist, and eventually you will win through. This is the message which they have in their original context, although the person encouraged in that case is the lover-student of Ovid's didactic text. In this passage of the *Ars Amatoria*, the poet assures his reader that if he continues to send letters to his mistress, she will eventually admit him to her affections. After all, even water wears down rock in time.

This aphoristic call to persistence works as well in the basilica as in the imaginary world of the elegiac lover. At the same time, however, the choice of Ovid to answer Ovid (and Propertius) is curiously coincidental. This is especially true given the fact that the conceit of the *Ars Amatoria*, from which the 'responding' quotation is drawn, is that as a whole it represents a kind of response to the canonical elegies written by Propertius and Ovid himself in the *Amores*: the *Ars* is a didactic work which seeks to teach a young man how to act like the poet-lover depicted in the earlier text. It thus makes good sense as a source for the couplet which offers a solution—persistence—to the obstacle of the doors named in the earlier verses and the mercenary voices of the *lenae* they quote. Yet it is also worth noting that there is a less thematic and more purely aesthetic connection between the first

and second texts on the basilica wall, one which lies in the sound coincidence between *surdus* ('deaf', the adjective which animated both of the earlier couplets) and *durus* ('hard') which appears in both lines from the *Ars Amatoria*. Of course, the metaphorical meanings of the two adjectives, insofar as they both signify the unyielding nature of the opposing object, are similar. Rather than some lofty poetic theme, the double uses of the adjective in the first, four-line pastiche and the second couplet from the *Ars*, then, may be the thing which connected them in the author's mind.

Yet the poetic tale of this section of basilica wall does not end there. Indeed, immediately below the quotations just discussed are two more sets of couplets. First, *CIL* 4. 1896:

ubi perna cocta est si convivae apponitur
non gustat pernam lingit ollam aut caccabum.

When the ham has been cooked, if it is placed before the guest,
he doesn't taste the ham [but] licks the pot and pan.

Unlike the earlier quotations, this is not an elegiac couplet but rather two iambic senarii; both meter and vocabulary (*perna*, *olla*, *cacabus*) clearly mark the verses as having roots in the world of comedy.⁴³ As in the verses already discussed, however, they have a strong aphoristic tone, their message being that people tend not to want the good things placed directly in front of them. Instead they insist on having something else which simply conveys the 'flavour' of what they desire. Although at first glance, their style and substance seem to mark a distinct break from the earlier elegiac fragments, they do speak to the theme of desire and gratification. Again, however, it is worth noting the double use of a single word, a noun this time: *perna*, which appears in the first line in the nominative and then the accusative. Like *surdus* and *durus* in the earlier texts, this is also a word of two syllables which turns on a hard 'r' sound; again, therefore, it may be this as much as a thematic connection, which caused the couplet to be placed in the basilica's 'collection'.

⁴³ Discussed by Gigante (1979) 148. As with the following text, we have no way of knowing whether this represents a quotation from a work now lost to us or an 'independent' composition. Metrically, it conforms with the 'Bentley-Luchs' law which states that in verse written for stage performance 'the second-to-last foot in the line cannot be filled by an iambic word-end' (Fortson (2008) 37). On the other hand, it violates Meyer's law (on which, see Fortson (2008) 54)—but so does Plautus, more than 200 times in his extant work.

Finally, to complete the collection the senarii lines are followed by another set (CIL 4. 1898):

quisquis amat calidis non debet fontibus uti
nam nemo flammas ustus amare potest.

Whoever loves should not enjoy hot springs,
for no one who has been burned is able to love flames.

This is once again an elegiac couplet, like the quotations from Ovid and Propertius, but unlike those texts it does not appear to have a referent in our body of canonical elegy. Although it is possible that it cites a work which is now lost to us, it seems just as likely that it is an ‘independent’ or at least non-literary composition. Nevertheless, it employs a common but rather unobvious joke on the trope of ‘burning desire’: the lover, already ablaze, should avoid even hot water, since surely no one loves the experience of loving and wants to make it worse. Perhaps we may again see that there is a thematic link with the earlier fragments. If the *Ars* quotation insists that persistence is the solution to frustrated desire, and the senarii suggest that that frustration is self-generated and thus easily cured, the final couplet would seem to say that burning desire is simply a (physical) fact of the lover’s existence, something to be endured rather than resolved. Yet also again, we see that there is a double word-usage: *amat* in line 1 is picked up by *amare* in line 2. Although the first instance lacks the hard ‘r’ sound which characterizes *surdus*, *durus*, and *perna*, *amare* picks it up, and the short ‘a’ at the beginning of *amat* and *amare* echoes that at the end of *perna*.

It is possible, then, to create an interpretation which thematically links the messages of all of these basilica inscriptions: all of them speak about issues of desire and denial. But it is also possible to see that there is a purely aesthetic connection between the verses, one which does not depend on any external knowledge of genre, canonical author, or poetic theme, but which may be appreciated from simply reading the words written on the wall. In this context, we may wish to reconsider the ‘collection’ of Tiburtinus, with its imagined theme of unhappy love—although the fragmentary nature of the texts makes it difficult to be sure, there are a number of word repetitions, as *incidunt* in Poem 1 becomes *incendia* in Poem 2; *flamam* is repeated in 1 and 2; the *vicini* of Poem 2 may reappear in Poem 3; and *tradere utei liceat* becomes *condere uti liceat* between Poems 2 and 5. Thus, although the basilica poems appear on the surface to be far more aphoristic and less

'personal' in tone than Tiburtinus', both may in fact be framed by the same compositional strategy, one which has as much to do with the aesthetics of verbal repetition as thematic play. Put in slightly different terms, we might say that the two groups of texts both admit two distinct types of reading, based on the different levels of knowledge about canonical literature which the reader brings. In one, the different texts on the wall are unified by their citation and manipulation of elite literature, and in the other they are brought together by fairly basic syntactic signs. The two types of reading are not, of course, mutually exclusive, but they do suggest that the writers of the collections were sensitive to the different possible principles which might govern the creation of such epigrammatic 'anthologies'.

Despite this similarity, there are clear differences between the work of Tiburtinus and that of the anonymous writer of the texts on the basilica wall. It is useful to consider them together, however, because (as I have argued) the fact of Tiburtinus' signature has made the writings around it subject to Foucault's 'author effect': we are inclined to look for unity and coherence, as well as 'literary' aspirations, because we can imagine a particular individual as standing behind the group of texts as a whole. But the example of the basilica collection suggests that such groupings of texts could be created—as, in fact, were anthologies of Hellenistic epigrams—out of a combination of independent compositions and canonical quotations, or even solely out of quotations. The act of authorship which the reader might have been expected to appreciate, therefore, would have resided in the artful arrangement of other writers' original compositions. The anonymity of the basilica collection, in contrast to the 'signed' work of Tiburtinus, also underscores the possibility of a kind of authorship which does not depend on an association with a single personal identifier. In other words, the namelessness of the author/writer in the basilica is itself an important way of 'defining and characterizing' the meaning of the poetic fragments. At the same time that the basilica writer (or writers) refuses to substitute his/her own name for that of the great canonical poets from whom he/she has taken at least the first, quoted, lines of the collection, that choice of anonymity creates a gap which begs to be filled—by speculation about the identity, status, influences, and motivations of the person behind the writing hand. Yet the refusal to self-name also foregrounds the possibility that anyone might be an author; anyone might claim a

space on the wall of the basilica and (more metaphorically) in the history of literary production.

It is worth noting, however, that the sense of individuality which has been attributed to the work of Tiburtinus is not simply the product of his signature; it is also assisted by the notional intimacy of the eroticism expressed in the texts. The named author's description of the experience of unhappy love has a directness and sense of lived reality which is lacking in the epigrams from the basilica wall. Of course, it is clear that this pose of authenticity is a generic motif, that is, it is a quality of the Hellenistic epigrams on which at least the first of Tiburtinus' poems is based. This does not mean that whoever wrote the texts on the small theatre wall was or was not really in love. My point is simply to note that the aphoristic or sententious tone of the quotations which make up the basilica collection goes more neatly with the idea of an anonymous author. The kind of gnomic wisdom which the quotations express seems to arise out of a generalized human knowledge, which contrasts with the individuality of the erotic experiences described by Tiburtinus. But not only is this sense of individual subjectivity a hallmark of the genre of erotic epigram, and thus not something which should cause us to believe, necessarily, that it reflects Tiburtinus' personal history, it is also something which is felt in many different graffiti from the walls of Pompeii. Graffiti are often seen as providing unmediated access to the personalities of ancient writers: what they 'really' felt, thought, and experienced. As I have discussed, however, the collections of epigrams by Tiburtinus and the anonymous writer in the basilica seem to depend on and themselves create a more complicated form of authorial self-representation. In the next section, I will continue to explore and expand our understanding of graffiti authorship by looking at a group of inscriptions which arise from a different, less elite, kind of literate practice: the writing of personal letters.

NAMING NAMES: IDENTITY AND EPISTOLOGRAPHY IN POMPEIAN GRAFFITI

In considering the nature of claims of personal authorship in ancient graffiti, it is worth considering what role names play in Pompeian wall

writing more broadly. I have noted before (in Chapter 1) the ways in which public writing in the form of formal inscriptions had by the first century CE become closely associated with the display of elite identity: putting one's name on a building or a statue base was an important means of performing and maintaining the requisite aristocratic presence in the public sphere. In Pompeii and Herculaneum, we see this practice broadened by means of the political programmata, which served the dual function of advertising for votes in the streets of the cities and (even after the election) reminding viewers of the importance and worthiness of the men they supported. As I have remarked elsewhere (in Chapter 2), the names of the candidates in programmata were often the only thing fully written out due to the widespread practice of abbreviation for the rest of the text. The letters used for the candidate's name, moreover, were often several times the size of the others in the notice. In other words, the programmata too were clearly part of a culture which saw the exhibition of personal names in public space as an important means of establishing elite male identity.

Given this, it is not surprising that Pompeian graffiti too show an enormous interest in proper names. Many texts consist solely of a name, or several of them joined by a simple verb or conjunction. Of course, names have been, and continue to be, an important part of wall writing in many different eras, places, and societies. Even within Pompeii we can see evidence of this: the Temple of Isis and the Villa of Diomedes display the names of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century visitors to the site, scratched into the soft plaster in much the same way that the long-dead Roman inhabitants had done before them. The practice is so widespread, in fact, that we might be inclined to consider the desire to inscribe one's identity on a wall as something close to a fundamental human impulse, transcending time and culture. It is tempting to link this assertive naming with the idea that graffiti represent the opportunity for those without cultural power to make their personal mark (literally) in the public sphere. Thus, Susan Sontag wrote that New York in the 1980s was covered by

[a] tide of indecipherable signatures of mutinous adolescents which has washed over and bitten into the facades of monuments and the surfaces of public vehicles in the city where I live: graffiti as an assertion of disrespect, yes, but most of all simply an assertion. . . . the powerless saying: I'm here, too.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Sontag (1987) 122–31, at 122.

For Sontag, there is a close association between the fact that graffiti consist of signatures and their ‘assertion’ of presence, something which might well be true of ancient Pompeian wall texts also. I have argued elsewhere that ancient cities were much more open to the production of unauthorized texts—in part precisely because of the use of public space for the assertion of elite identity which seems to be imitated by the writers of graffiti. Nevertheless, it seems likely that there were some among those who inscribed their names on walls in Pompeii who simply wanted, like Sontag’s ‘mutinous adolescents’, to assert that they were there too.⁴⁵

There is, however, another aspect of the texts which contain names in Pompeian graffiti which distinguishes them from practices such as ‘tagging’ in the modern urban environment. This is the large number of texts which do not simply record the name of the presumed writer but also that of an addressee or addressees. Thus, for instance, a standard text might say *Vettius Cranio salutem* (‘Vettius [gives] a greeting to Cranius’: *CIL* 4. 2950), or *Suc[ces]sus Fel[i]ci salutem et For[tu]natae* (‘Sucessus [gives] a greeting to Felix and Fortunata’: *CIL* 4. 5373), or even *Habitus Secundo et s[u]is amabiliter salutem* (‘Habitus [gives] a greeting in the most friendly way to Secundus and his family’: *CIL* 4. 10247). On one level, there might seem to be little difference between these texts and a phrase like ‘Hi Dave!’ which one might find on a modern bathroom wall. Linguistically and socially, however, there is significant additional information which is offered by the Pompeian inscriptions. First and most obviously, the Latin provides not simply the name of the addressee but of the speaker; while in the modern example, the writer would have to add a ‘from Sarah’ to indicate the source of the greeting, the ancient phrase *Vettius Cranio salutem* is able to use morphology to express neatly and compactly the actor (nominative Vettius) and the indirect object of his action (dative Cranio). This brings us to a second significant difference, though, which is that whereas ‘Hi Dave!’ mimics the form of conversation—the phrase is no different from that which would be used in a face-to-face encounter between the two people—the ancient examples are expressed in a seemingly rather cold third person.

⁴⁵ Apropos of this, it is worth noting that a few graffiti in Safaitic (a language originating on the Arabian peninsula and only there spoken widely in antiquity) have been found in Pompeii. These texts consist solely of names, attesting to the widespread desire to leave an onomastic mark on the city’s walls: Calzini Gysens (1990), 1–7.

Although we assume that, for instance, it is Vettius who wrote the phrase ‘Vettius [gives] a greeting to Cranius’, he has used a linguistic form which speaks directly neither from himself nor to his addressee.

The reason for this, on the surface, peculiar linguistic habit in Pompeian graffiti is that the wall writers are echoing the patterns not of live conversation, but instead of a material, textual practice: the writing of letters. The form ‘X gives a greeting to Y’ is the traditional salutation at the beginning of an ancient Roman missive, both formal and personal.⁴⁶ Yet its abstracted nature—that it speaks of both writer and recipient in the third person—is in certain senses as curious in ancient terms as it would be in the modern day. Roman epistolary theorists are clear that a letter, especially a personal one, should be like speech. As Seneca writes, *quails sermo meus esset, si una sederemus aut ambularemus . . . tales esse epistulas meas volo* (‘Just as my conversation would be, if we were sitting or walking together . . . so I want my letters to be’: *Ep. Mor.* 75. 1).⁴⁷ Cicero too sees a good letter as one which reflects as closely as possible the spoken interaction the writer and reader would have if they were physically together (e.g. *Ep. ad Fam.* 9. 10. 1–2). Clearly this principle relates to the body of the letter, its content and style, but the salutation seems to be aimed at a different end. There is, of course, a certain practical element to the ancient convention: by the use of a third-person formula, the names of both writer and intended reader are presented at the head of the text, a practice which contrasts with modern personal letters where the name of the author is held back until the concluding signature. This custom would be especially inconvenient in an ancient context, where skipping to the end of the missive might mean unfolding or unrolling the entire papyrus.

Such a practical nod to the materiality of the epistle, however, should serve to remind us of the very real, very material, social element of letter writing. That is, letters exist because of the need and desire for communication between two people across geographical distance—they are, in this sense, a material manifestation of the relationship between writer and addressee.⁴⁸ One function of the opening salutation in ancient Roman letters is verbally to express

⁴⁶ On ancient epistolary opening formulae, see Trapp (2003) 34–8.

⁴⁷ Malherbe (1988) 12.

⁴⁸ Trapp (2003): ‘More obviously than many other kinds of writing, letters exist in order to establish and conduct relationships, between senders and recipients’ (41).

that relationship, which is sometimes explicitly defined in an individual letter opening, e.g. *Cicero s(alutem) d(icit) Cornificio conlegae* ('Cicero sends a greeting to Cornificius, his colleague': *Ep. ad Fam.* 12. 16. 17). At Pompeii, this practice too is imitated, so that we find salutations addressed to *sodales* ('comrades': *CIL* 4. 1105, 2154, 3786, 4838, et al.), *fratres* ('brothers': *CIL* 1275, 3905, 5350, etc.), *sorores* ('sisters': *CIL* 3905, 8883), a *pater* ('father': *CIL* 4753), a *conlega* ('colleague': *CIL* 1852), an *amicus* ('friend': *CIL* 8227), and two different groups of *conservi* ('fellow slaves': *CIL* 1241, 4752). *CIL* 4. 8177 simply adds the adjectives *dulcissimae* ('sweetest') and *amantissimae* ('most loving') to the name of the addressee. At the same time that these letter salutations express the nature of the relationship between two people, however, the use of the third rather than first and second persons functions to call attention to the separation of the writer and addressee; while the letter may go on to imitate the forms of conversation, the opening formula reminds us that this is not, in fact, a direct spoken exchange. The Roman letter salutation, then—as used in actual epistolary writing and in graffiti—functions both to articulate the connection between the two people named and to underscore the distance between them which necessitates a material object (the letter or graffiti) to bridge it.

In short, we might say that the connection between letters and graffiti is obvious, despite the fact that one (the letter) is defined by its ability to move from place to place and the other (the graffiti) by the fact that it is spatially fixed. Both, however, are material texts which situate their authors within a wider social world. This is true even of the most basic graffiti expressed simply as 'X gives a greeting to Y', but the walls of Pompeii also supply more exaggerated examples. Thus, for instance, the back room of a shop at 1. 2. 7 preserved the text *Hirtia Psacas C. Hostilio Conopi coniugi suo manu ductori et Clementi monotori fratri et Diodot<a>e sorori et Fortunato fratri et Celeri suis salutem semper ubique plurima<m>, et Primigeniae suae salutem* ('Hirtia Psacas gives the most greetings always and everywhere to her husband C. Hostilius Conops the conductor and Clemens the assistant her brother and Diodota her sister and Fortunatus her brother and her dear Celer, and also greetings to her dear Primigenia': *CIL* 4. 3905).⁴⁹ Hirtia Psacas (by her name, clearly a

⁴⁹ Mau and Kelsey (1899) interprets *coniugi suo manu ductori et clementi monotori* as 'her husband and guide and gentle advisor' (487). Since the (admittedly limited)

freedwoman) is here advertising not just her marriage to Conops (again, clearly a freedman) but her relationships both familial and otherwise intimate with a number of other people. An even broader range of associations is claimed by the writings of a certain L. Quintilius Cresces, who identifies himself as a fuller by trade, who wrote a large number of short texts in the peristyle of the house at 5. 2. 4. Many of them offer greetings, but not to named individuals. Instead, Cresces' goodwill is expressed to 'the innkeeper' (*coponi*: CIL 4. 4100), to his fellow 'fullers' (*fullonibus*: CIL 4. 4120), and to both 'the fullers and the screech owl' (*fullonibus et ululae*: CIL 4. 4118).⁵⁰ Even more remarkably, he also expresses greetings to 'the Pompeians' (*Pompeianis*: CIL 4. 4102) and several other local citizenries: of Surrentium (*Surentinis*: CIL 4. 4103), of Salinae (*Salinesibus*: CIL 4. 4106), and of Stabiae (*Stabianis*: CIL 4. 4109). Cresces seems to have been a friendly fellow, but it is also important to recognize that the use of the letter salutation form in combination with the 'communal' addressees connects these texts with public missives sent on official business.⁵¹ By expressing his salutations to these communities, Cresces is styling himself as a man of power and influence who might have something to say to the populations of neighbouring towns.

Little critical attention has been paid to the salutations which appear on Pompeian walls, perhaps because they have been taken at face value and not seen as referring to epistolary practices. As I have argued, however, the form of the ancient Roman letter opening was sufficiently stable, distinct, and recognizable that both writers and readers must be understood to have made the connection between the phraseology of the graffiti greetings and those which appeared at the beginnings of traditional letters. In fact, it should not come as surprising that epistolary traditions make an appearance in Pompeian wall writings. It has long been recognized that letter writing was a fairly basic and extremely useful skill to have in the ancient Roman world. Roman society in the late Republic and early Empire was

parallels for the uses of *manuductor* and *monotor* in Latin show them only as job titles rather than endearments, I prefer to see them here as identifying labels and the word *clementi* as a proper name (Clemens) rather than an adjective ('gentle').

⁵⁰ The screech owl was the mascot of the fullers' guild.

⁵¹ e.g. the letters sent to the community of Aphrodisias by various powerful and imperial figures: Reynolds (1982).

highly hierarchical, characterized and organized by a complex network of interpersonal relationships between people at various levels: patrons who cared for clients; freedmen supporting and supported by former masters; even friends mutually dependent on each other for social and political, as well as emotional, support.⁵² Although face-to-face interactions were an important part of maintaining these relationships, letters also clearly played a role, both as material 'proof' of the intimacy between two people and because the Roman Empire was very large. Not only members of the aristocracy, but ordinary soldier-citizens could find themselves at a far geographical distance from friends, family, and the metropolitan centre (Rome) for long stretches of time. Among the elite, of course, we find letters elevated to high art in the correspondence of Cicero, Pliny, the *Epistulae Morales* of Seneca, even the *Heroides* of Ovid and the poetic epistles of Horace.⁵³ But letters were also written by those functioning at a much lower level in society, as can be seen in various papyrus collections from ancient Egypt on one side of the empire and, on the other, the remarkable collection of writing tablets from Vindolanda in Britain.⁵⁴

As with any literate practice in antiquity, our knowledge of what, and how, those outside the elite learned about letter writing is open to fair amount of conjecture. Certainly, epistolary practices were taught in schools, perhaps with the help of standardized textbooks (discussed later),⁵⁵ but it is difficult to know at what level the subject was introduced. As always, moreover, it is important to remember that there are different levels of literacy, and the ability to write one's own name, the name of a friend, and *sal* (for *salutem*) would not have required a great deal of knowledge. On the other hand, in the context of the Pompeian graffiti we may, I think, by and large dispense with a question which has bedevilled statements about literacy as displayed

⁵² I focus here on reasons why letter writing flourished under the Roman Empire, but it is worth noting that many of the factors I cite also apply to earlier periods, although perhaps not to so great an extent. It is clear, however, that the Hellenistic period in particular had a widespread culture of epistolography, something which must at some level have influenced the place of letters in the Roman world: Rosenmeyer (2001), 19–35.

⁵³ On the role of epistolarity in 'high' literary contexts, see Gibson and Morrison (2007) 1–16. Cf. Rosenmeyer (2001) *passim*.

⁵⁴ For general remarks about letters on papyri, see Parsons (1980) 3–19; Hutchinson (2007) 17–36. On the Vindolanda texts, see Bowman (1994*b*) esp. 79–96.

⁵⁵ Malherbe (1988) 4–7; Stirewalt (1993) 20–2; Rosenmeyer (2001) 32–3.

in papyri and the Vindolanda tablets, namely the use of professional scribes to write at least some of the texts.⁵⁶ I count 170 individual instances of letter salutations and other fragments among the graffiti preserved from the ancient Bay of Naples, and although there are some which are clearly by the same hand (such as those of Cresces the fuller, cited earlier), there is enough variation in orthography, handwriting, placement, and style that it does not seem likely that the rest can be attributed to a small number of individuals. It also seems improbable that people would generally write salutations in other people's names, although there are a couple of clear instances of the use of pseudonyms (e.g. *CIL* 4. 2018 a–c, in which Liar (*Mendax*) gives greetings to Truthful (*Veraci*), or 4447, where Puddle (*Fonticulus*) greets his Little Fish (*Pisciculo suo*)). It is true that we have two instances where a second individual—i.e. not the person named in the nominative in the salutation—claims authorship of greeting texts (*CIL* 4. 1934 and 2374), but the very fact that in these instances the writers go out of their way to distinguish themselves from the supposed speaker suggests that the practice was not common. Overall, however, it seems safe to assert that there was a significant number of people who wrote on walls in Pompeii and had at least a passing familiarity with the formula used for opening a letter.

This is significant because, despite Foucault's assertion that 'a private letter . . . does not have an author', the phenomenon of epistolary writing in the ancient Roman world has important implications for thinking about popular authorship. That is, letters are frequently used as the beginning of literacy studies in the modern day, in part because they put the emphasis on the social utility of writing: they illustrate the ways in which the written word can be a tool which enables connections and relationships between people.⁵⁷ Yet letters also historically, and certainly in antiquity, have been bound by certain conventional compositional rules, about how they look, what information they include, in what terms they are expressed.⁵⁸ Thus, they also force the student to recognize the need for a kind of generic approach to literacy, so that beyond the requirements of correct spelling and sentence composition, she or he must embrace more subtle, culturally dictated constraints on

⁵⁶ Adams (1995) 86–134; see Harris (1989) 141–5 on papyri.

⁵⁷ See Kell (2000) 209–32; Hall, Robinson, and Crawford (2000) 131–49.

⁵⁸ Stirewalt (1993) 10–15; Koskenniemi (1956).

written self-representation.⁵⁹ It is perhaps for this reason that letters have been the foundation of other genres of writing,⁶⁰ or even, for some, have come to be seen as the model for all literary activity. Gibson and Morrison (2007) quote Derrida: ‘Mixture is the letter, the epistle, which is not a genre but all genres, literature itself.’⁶¹ The presence on Pompeian walls of letter salutations suggests not only that a certain number of people were familiar with the forms and traditions of epistolography, but that they were able to transfer the sense of themselves as authors which they found there—and which finds its most succinct verbal expression in the letter’s opening formula—to the writing of graffiti. There were several factors which enabled this transfer: the teaching of epistolary forms at fairly low levels of education; the ‘social’ nature of wall writing; the shared materiality of graffiti and letter writing. At the same time, however, the importation of epistolary authorship to graffiti meant the importation of some of the other aspects of epistolography—that is, the terms in which people were taught to express themselves in letters also appear on Pompeian walls and give an additional dimension to the ways in which a writer represents him- or herself and the relationship with his/her audience.

This becomes particularly clear when we note a number of statements and phrases which generally appear in Pompeian graffiti alongside letter salutations and, when examined carefully, further reflect and refract epistolary forms and traditions. Thus, for instance, there is a text which appeared on the north wall of the basilica, among many other fragments of writing, which runs *Pyrrhus Chio conlegae sal(utem)/moleste fero quod audivi te mortuom itaque val(e)* (‘Pyrrhus gives greetings to his colleague Chius: I am sorry to hear that you are dead. Therefore, farewell’: *CIL* 4. 1852). See Figure 3.5 for a line drawing of the text. Clearly this is intended as a joke, one which in part turns on the humour of the conventional opening (*salutem* means, literally, ‘health’) and closing (*vale*, which signifies ‘be strong’)

⁵⁹ See Kell’s (2000) observation of the discomfort displayed by South African men who, upon writing their first letters, were encouraged by their teacher to close their epistles with something like ‘Your dear husband’, a phrase which was felt by the men to be too intimate. The teacher, however, ‘insisted that the format of the letter must be complied with’ (213). In more general terms, we may note the ways in which letter writing was used during the 18th and 19th centuries to inculcate middle-class values in young adults: Dierks (2000) 31–41; Augst (2003) 71–9.

⁶⁰ Bazerman (2000) 15–29.

⁶¹ Gibson and Morrison (2007) 1–16, at 3.

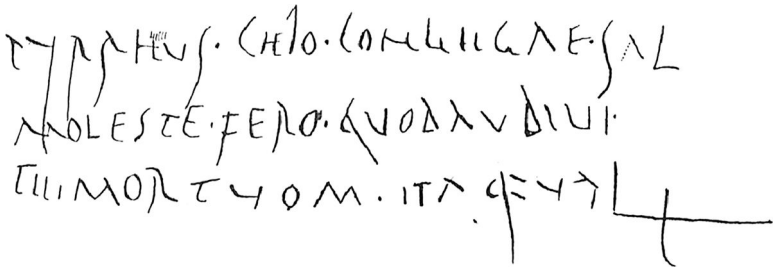


Figure 3.5. Line drawing of *CIL* 4. 1852, from *CIL* vol. 4.

epistolary formulae—which, in this instance, wish physical well-being to a supposedly dead addressee. But the wit also lies in the fact that this ‘letter’ is a parody of one of the paradigmatic types of ancient epistles, namely the letter of consolation, conventionally sent to a friend or acquaintance who has sustained some kind of loss.⁶² Obviously, there is a joke in the attempt to console someone for his own death, but there is further, more subtle, wit in the reversal and implicit critique of the norms of the genre. Pyrrhus—who might normally receive supportive letters when he lost a friend—writes his own consolation to the person for whom, surely, Chius’ death was rather more of a tragedy, namely, Chius himself. A similar joke on epistolary norms may be seen in *CIL* 4. 1593, where a woman whose full name is not preserved gives a greeting to Alexander, adding *si vales non mi [l]tu<m> curo s[i] perieris gau]deo* (‘if you are well, I don’t much care; if you have died, I’m overjoyed’: *CIL* 4. 1593 w/p. 209). Again, there is humour in the contrast between the opening wish of health and the following statement dismissing the addressee’s wellness. But when we see this fragment in the context of epistolary tropes, we may also see it as a parody of the ‘friendly’ letter, so that, instead of functioning as a token of the author’s goodwill, the text here stands as a monument to her lack of interest in her addressee’s well-being.

When we examine the corpus of Pompeian graffiti with an eye towards epistolary conventions, in fact, we find fragments from a

⁶² On the standard form of condolence letters in Greek, which certainly influenced the development of Latin letters, see Chapa (1998). Cf. Hutchinson (2007) 34–5.

number of different traditional types of letter:⁶³ of recommendation (*CIL* 4. 1607 w/p. 209); of gratitude (*CIL* 4. 7382); of inquiry about a friend's well-being (*CIL* 4. 8347);⁶⁴ of response to such an inquiry (*CIL* 4. 2413f.);⁶⁵ of petition (perhaps for money: *CIL* 4. 1684); and of admonishment (*CIL* 4. 2015).⁶⁶ We even possess an admirably succinct love letter: *Secundus Prim<a>e suae ubi/que isse* [for *ipse* or *ipsae*] *salute(m) | rogo domina | ut me ames* ('Secundus [gives a] greeting to his very own Prima herself: I ask, mistress, that you love me': *CIL* 4. 8364). Again, scholars have not generally given these texts much attention, nor seen them as part of a group—and, indeed, were it not paired with a salutation, we might have seen *rogo domina ut me ames* as merely an idle expression of desire. Once we recognize it as emerging from the world of epistolary composition, however, we can begin to see not only that graffiti are clearly connected to another genre of writing, but the ways in which the conventions of that other genre have influenced what wall writers say and how they say it. Secundus' request appears not just as an expression of heartfelt yearning, but as a formal petition, whose material manifestation as a graffiti echoes the socially approved materialization of other kinds

⁶³ On epistolary types, see Pseudo-Demetrius, *Τύποι Ἐπιστολικοί*, text and translation in Malherbe (1988) 31–41. Koskenniemi argues that these different types were probably not, in actual practice, strictly distinguished from one another: Koskenniemi (1956) 62. My point here is not to insist on the particular categories of letter, but to suggest that the styles and themes outlined by epistolary theorists like Pseudo-Demetrius are also those found in the graffiti letters.

⁶⁴ Pace the editors of *CIL*, it seems to me a stretch to see the question expressed in this graffiti—*quid agit tibi dexter ocellus?* or 'What's going on with your right eye?'—as euphemism for an erotic affair. On the prevalence of health as a topic in ancient letters, see Morello and Morrison (2007*b*) pp. i–xvi, at pp. viii–ix.

⁶⁵ This graffiti reads *Romulus Cerdoni sal(utem) | scias volo | me tui curam legisse*, which I would translate 'Romulus [gives a] greeting to Cerdon: I want you to know that I have read your concern'. The use of the possessive adjective in a subjective sense, however, is not standard in classical Latin, so that *tui curam* should mean 'my (or someone else's) concern for you'. I suspect that the writer has simply erred in his usage, but even if the latter interpretation is preferred, the author is clearly responding to a written expression of concern for someone's welfare.

⁶⁶ The text reads *Isthmus Successe ubique salute(m) et quod te rogavi ut quod iurasti* ('Isthmus [gives a] greeting to Successus: Also, because I asked you that what you swore...'). Possibly, however, the writer has mistakenly written *ut* instead of *et*, in which case we should translate, 'Both what I asked you and what you swore...'

of requests in formal or informal epistles. Thus, the overlap between conventional types of actual letters and the types of graffiti letters found in Pompeii is not simply coincidental, it reflects a knowledge and understanding of the kinds of things one uses a letter to say, as well as the way that saying things in the form of a letter can give them weight and significance beyond what the words alone actually mean.

Of course, the recognition of generic influence from letter writing on Pompeian graffiti writers has significance for questions of both authorship and authenticity in ancient wall writing. If we see the letter fragments not as direct or unmediated statements of selfhood, but rather texts which emerge within and are (on some level) dependent on specific generic constraints, what does that say about the role and position of the graffiti writer/author? In a certain sense, this question is merely a more particular version of a standard question which often arises about literature, that is, how an author finds his/her individual artistic voice within particular generic rules.⁶⁷ Letters, however, present something of a different problem, partly because they are in the modern day, and were even in antiquity, imagined to be deeply 'personal', authentic statements and representations of self. As Cicero writes to one correspondent, *te totum in litteris vidi* ('I saw all of you in your letter': *ad Fam.* 16. 16. 2). More elaborately, Seneca contrasts the experience of reading a letter from a friend with merely seeing an image of him: *si imagines nobis amicorum absentium iucundae sunt, quae memoriam renovant et desiderium falso atque inani solacio levant, quanto iucundiores sunt litterae, quae vera amici absentis vestigia, veras notas adverunt?* ('if pictures of absent friends bring pleasure to us, which renew our memories and relieve our longing with false and empty comfort, how much more pleasant are letters, which bring us the true traces, the real signs of an absent friend?': *Ep. Mor.* 40.1). Yet at the same time, we have significant evidence of quite direct generic influence on personal letters, such as the series of practice letters found on the Bologna Papyrus (P.Bon. 5) which includes epistolary congratulations, advice, and admonitions in parallel Greek and Latin.⁶⁸ Indeed, it has long been recognized that ancient handbooks played an important role in how and what people learned to write even in personal letters, something for which we have

⁶⁷ See Devitt (2008) 137–62 for an introduction to and discussion of this issue.

⁶⁸ Text and translation in Malherbe (1988) 44–57.

better evidence from the Greek world but was likely true for the Romans as well.⁶⁹

An important example of how epistolary conventions influenced the fragments found on Pompeian walls may be found in a set of graffiti from the House of Maius Castricius, located in the 'Insula Occidentalis' on the city's western edge (7. 16. 17). This house itself is somewhat puzzling, the more so because (despite the fact that the work on the site was done in the 1970s) the excavation report has yet to be published. Fortunately, Carlo Giordano and subsequently Heikki Solin were independently able to work on and publish the substantial graffiti remains from several walls within the house.⁷⁰ For my purposes here, it is a group of texts from a finely painted room off a large peristyle⁷¹ which are most interesting. Here we find several letter salutations, such as *Secundus Onesimo fratri suo p[lu]rimam perpetuamque salutem* ('Secundus [gives] the greatest and most lasting greeting to his brother Onesimus'), along with a sentence clearly intended for a personal letter, *occasionem nactus non praetermisi tibi scribendi ut scires me recte valere* ('Having obtained the opportunity of writing, I have not let it go by in order that you should know that I am very well').⁷² On the surface, this statement does not strike one as terribly unusual, and the context in the House of Maius Castricius certainly suggests that whoever wrote it was doing so for practice: not only does it appear with 'responding' epistolary salutations—e.g. *Secundo plurimam amabiliter salutem* ('Greatest and most friendly greeting to Secundus')—but the phrase *occasionem nactus* is twice more repeated on the same wall.⁷³

Indeed, the extent to which this sentence is conventional is illustrated by some phrases found in the Vindolanda tablets, fragments of

⁶⁹ In part because of the strong influence of Greek educational practices on Roman: Trapp (2003) 35–6; Rosenmeyer (2001) 32.

⁷⁰ Giordano (1966) 73–89; Solin (1975) 243–66. For an overall analysis of all the graffiti fragments found in this dwelling, and their relationship to one another, see Benefiel (2010) 59–101.

⁷¹ This is the location of the fragments given by Solin (1975) 263; Benefiel (2010) 97–8, however, hypothesizes a different original findspot.

⁷² Giordano (1966) nos. 9, 11.

⁷³ Giordano (1966) nos. 16, 7, 12. Lebek (1985) 53–61 notes the fact that these are all epistolary fragments and relates them to Roman education. He also connects the fragments from Pompeii with the Vindolanda tablets, as I do later, although he does not discuss what material connection there could be between the two places (or with Dacia, where another similar fragment was also found).

wooden writing materials excavated at a fort near Hadrian's Wall in Britain. The tablets contain a number of letter fragments from and to various people at the encampment, including everyone from higher-level administrators to ordinary soldiers to some of the resident women. Curiously, the Vindolanda letters contain significant echoes of the language of the Maius Castricius graffiti. One fragment from Britain begins with the phrase *occasion]em nactus sum scribendi* ('I have obtained the opportunity of writing': *Tab. Vind.* II. 212), while two more open with variations on the expression beginning *ut scires* mentioned earlier: *ut scias me recte valere* ('that you should know I am very well': *Tab. Vind.* II. 311)⁷⁴ and *scias me recte esse* ('you should know that I am well': *Tab. Vind.* III. 670). Incidentally, both of these latter two letters follow the *scias* phrase with the same words, *quod te invicem facere cupio* ('which I hope you are also in turn'), which led J. N. Adams to conclude that this was 'a local (British?) epistolary formula'.⁷⁵ I would by no means dispute this characterization, although, again, it is certainly true that the sentiments expressed in these phrases are far from extraordinary. On the other hand, it is worth noting that classical Latin literature offers few direct parallels for the expression *occasionem nactus . . . scribendi*—none which contain the gerund of *scribo*⁷⁶—and no parallels at all for the phrasing of *ut scires/scias me recte valere*.⁷⁷ It is true, as Cugusi notes, that *scias*

⁷⁴ Note the grammatically correct shift in the subjunctive from secondary sequence (following *praetermisi*) in the sentence from the House of Maius Castricius to primary (following *cupio*) in Vindolanda letter 311.

⁷⁵ Adams (2002) 262; cf. (2003a) 530–75, at 574.

⁷⁶ Adams cites Cic. *Ad Fam.* 12. 17. 2 (*me scito . . . quasi occasionem quandam . . . nactum scribere*) and 10. 31. 1 (*nunc vero nactus occasionem . . . scribam ad te*): Adams (1995) 86–134; 126. Pliny, *Epist.* 3. 17. 1 does have *occasio scribendi* (without *nactus*: Lebek (1985) 59). Also worth noting is a parallel from within the Vindolanda tablets themselves: *Tab. Vind.* II. 225 offers the phrase *amplexus s[um do] | mine salutandi te occasionem* ('I have embraced the opportunity of saluting you, master').

⁷⁷ Although Lebek (1985) 58 offers a number of parallels for the general phrasing, as well as some compelling evidence from Greek letters. It may perhaps also be noted that the use of *ut* in the two cases—the Vindolanda letter and the Pompeian graffito—are distinct, in that the first is a noun clause following *cupio* while the second is clearly a clause of purpose. The full text of this part of the letter runs *ut scias me recte valere quod te invicem fecisse cupio* ('I want you to know that I am very well, a thing which I wish for you in turn'). It is worth noting, however, that the *ut* noun-clause in the Vindolanda letter is quite awkward, as it is not immediately clear that the author expects *cupio* to govern two different constructions (the *ut*-clause and the perfect infinitive). This suggests to me that *ut* was an established part of the *scias* phrase and not, therefore, lightly to be omitted.

and other forms of the verb are common in ancient letters,⁷⁸ but especially given this, it is noteworthy that nothing similar to the following phrase found in Vindolanda and Pompeii is found elsewhere in Latin epistolography. Moreover, a textual scrap (a tile apparently used to practise writing) was also found in Roman Dacia which reads *occasion[em] nan(c)tus [sum] scrib(endi)* (CIL 3. 1635. 4), again echoing the formula found in the House of Maius Castricius.⁷⁹

In short, I would argue that there is a connection beyond the mere coincidental between the letter fragment inscribed on the wall of the House of Maius Castricius and the epistolary texts discovered in Vindolanda and Dacia. It is, of course, possible that both are (consciously or unconsciously) citing the opening of a well-known literary letter which is now lost to us, but the lack of parallels in other canonical epistles should, I think, suggest a more prosaic link. Given that we know that handbooks played a role in educating Romans in letter writing, it seems likely that the phrases which appear in the Vindolanda letters and on the wall in Pompeii were ultimately drawn from one which was in circulation during the second half of the first century CE.⁸⁰ How far it circulated is difficult to say, of course, since the writers in Vindolanda could have learned their epistolary habits elsewhere before being posted to the north of Britain, and the graffiti in Pompeii could reflect the instruction of a teacher who also came to the city from somewhere else. My aim here, therefore, is not to emphasize a specific material link between the two sets of texts, but to suggest that the parallel phrasing reflects the strength of the forces of generic standardization on personal letters in the Roman Empire. Although 'having obtained the opportunity of writing, I have not let it go by in order that you should know that I am very well' (the sentence from the House of Maius Castricius) sounds to a modern ear like a 'personal' sentiment—reflecting the writer's busy schedule (*occasionem nactus*), recognition of the recipient's desire for

⁷⁸ Cugusi (1983) 79.

⁷⁹ I owe this citation to Lebek (1985) 56.

⁸⁰ The areas and levels from which the Vindolanda tablets were generally drawn date to the period of occupation immediately preceding the rule of the Emperor Hadrian. Bowman and Thomas give 'the extreme limits' of the tablets' dating as 95–115 CE, although they also acknowledge that they could have been written before that time: (1983) 53. Tablet 311 contains a possible reference to the *cohors iii Batavorum*, which may have been at the fort between 105 and 115 CE. Tablet 670, however, was found in a much later stratum, which may be dated to the last quarter of the 2nd century CE.

communication (*non praetermissi*), and concern for the addressee's investment in the writer's well-being (*ut scires me recte valere*)—the parallels in Vindolanda force us to see it as a representation of self strongly governed by epistolary convention.

In other words, the emphasis on naming which characterizes the openings of both real Roman letters and their echoes in the Pompeian graffiti, as well as the direct and intimate tone of some of the fragments preserved on ancient urban walls, initially pushes us to see them as assertions of a certain kind of individual authorial identity, the 'I'm here, too' of Sontag's mutinous adolescents. Yet the recognition of how deeply letter writing was not only implicated in the Roman social hierarchy but also dependent on the imitation of standardized models—in everything from general content to specific phrasing—suggests more wide-ranging cultural influences on this kind of written self-representation. This is not to say there are no authentic sentiments expressed in graffitied letter fragments. Just because anyone who says 'I love you' to someone is echoing the many thousands of people in both art and life who have said it before does not mean it isn't, on some level, true. Rather, I would argue that we should see in the epistolary texts on Pompeian walls a reflection of one way in which certain Romans, perhaps primarily those outside the cultural elite, were taught to think about the act of authorship: not just as something which an individual did alone, reflecting his/her unique subjectivity as manifested in writing, but as a collaborative or corporate enterprise in which the task of creating words and meaning is shared with others. As I noted earlier, this kind of authorship seems to have been the dominant model in the Middle Ages, when—in contrast with later periods when true authorship became associated with genius and originality—'new writing derived its value and authority from its affiliation with the texts that preceded it, its derivation rather than its deviation from prior texts'.⁸¹ Although it is clear that among the Roman elite, a high premium was placed on individual creation and ownership of texts, it appears that other models of creativity were also in circulation, models which saw appropriation as an authorial act in its own right.

⁸¹ Woodmansee (1994) 17.

FRAGMENTARY THINKING, SPEAKING,
AND WRITING

As I have noted, it is well established that, in certain arenas, the Romans had a high regard for the repetition and quotation of notable phrases from others' work. In oratory, the reuse of *sententiae* from various sources was so widespread that Quintilian complains that modern authors write as though the production of such pithy epigrams was the only merit of literature (*Inst. Orat.* 1.8.9). The elder Seneca sees it as one of the marks of the decline of rhetoric in his age that young speakers 'lay claim to the *sententiae* made by the most eloquent of men' (*sententias a disertissimis viris factas . . . pro suis dicunt: Controv.* 1. Pref. 10). At the same time, however, Seneca includes in his collection an excursus on the merits of Publilius Syrus, a first-century-BCE author of mimes, as a source for punning maxims (*Contr.* 7. 3. 8). Quintilian additionally attributes a special kind of authority to *sententiae* which 'are able to express the opinion of nations, peoples, wise men, famous citizens, or well-known poets' (*visum gentibus, populis, sapientibus viris, claris civibus, inlustribus poetis referri potest: 5. 11. 36*). In fact, he goes on, 'even popular sayings and the received wisdom of the common people are not without merit. For they are testimony of a certain kind, particularly powerful because they were not created for use in law cases, but, to minds free from hatred and bias, they simply seemed to be the most honourable and truthful things to say and do' (*Ne haec quidem vulgo dicta et recepta persuasione populari sine usu fuerint. Testimonia sunt enim quodam modo, vel potentiora etiam quod non causis accommodata sunt, sed liberis odio et gratia mentibus ideo tantum dicta factaque quia aut honestissima aut verissima videbantur: Inst. Orat.* 5. 11. 37).

This last statement by Quintilian is particularly interesting because it expresses an idea which has not been especially well explored in the case of the ancient world, namely that although there are certain aspects of Roman popular culture which certainly 'trickled down' from the elite, there were also ways in which popular ideas influenced elite cultural products. In the case of literature, this porous boundary between the life of the street and that of the aristocracy has been particularly difficult to study, in part because of how little we know about the literate, or semi-literate, practices of those outside the upper

classes. One place where the general populace seems to have acquired a certain amount of familiarity with both the sound of meter and the idea of sententious utterance was the theatre. Florence Dupont calls the Romans, apropos of the prevalence of stage performances, ‘un peuple musicien’⁸² and Ovid vividly imagines them on the feast of Anna Perenna, lying on the banks of the Tiber and ‘sing[ing] whatever they learned in the theatre’ (*cantant quicquid didicere theatris: Fasti* 3. 535). Moreover, we have ample evidence that people liked to hear gnomic maxims spoken on stage, both in tragedies and comedies. Cicero laments the habit of wicked people of quoting from Accius’ *Atreus* (*Pro Sest.* 102), while Seneca describes how the audience erupts with applause in response to sententious lines about avarice in the mimes of Publilius Syrus (*Ep. Mor.* 108. 8). Plautus’ characters themselves are aware of their role as purveyors of maxims, so that the slave Gripus in the *Rudens* responds to Daemones’ moralizing, *spectavi ego pridem comicos ad istunc modum | sapienter dicta dicere atque is plaudier | quom illos sapientis mores monstrabant poplo* (‘I’ve seen comedians speak wisely in this way before, and get applauded for showing the people such prudent habits’: 1249–51).

It is less clear, however, whether and how *sententiae* learned from theatrical performances would have been translated into written forms. Certainly, the collection of maxims by Publilius Syrus which has come down to us offers evidence that such things were compiled, for the edification of those who could, or were learning to, read. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* remarks that, even though a student may think it clever to compile a list of *sententiae* from Ennius’ tragedies, it doesn’t require a great deal of learning to do so—again suggesting that it was a common-enough activity (*Rhet. ad Her.* 4. 4. 8). Plautus himself seems to have had access to such a collection, as Curculio remarks in the play which bears his name, *Antiquom poetam audivi scripsisse in tragoedia, | ‘mulieres duas peiores esse quam unam’* (‘I’ve heard that an ancient poet wrote in a tragedy, | “two women are worse than one”’: 591–2).⁸³ It is thus likely that at least some of the sententious iambic verses found among Pompeian graffiti came from compilations of these kinds, although others might have come directly from the stage. Examples include, for instance, a line which appears twice on the wall of Pompeii’s basilica, the senarius *minumum malum*

⁸² Dupont (2003) 115.

⁸³ Cf. *Truc.* 931–2.

fit contemnendo maximum ('Disparagement makes a small wrong into a great one': *CIL* 4. 1811 and 1870). Its popularity is also evidenced by its appearance among the graffiti in Herculaneum, along with the additional line *qui se tutari nescit nescit vivere* ('the man who does not know how to look after himself does not know how to live': *CIL* 4. 10634). Bücheler (*CLE* 35) suggested that we should see in *minimum malum* an echo of a line from the collection of Publilius Syrus, *neesse est minimo maximum esse initio* ('Great things by necessity come from small beginnings': 435). With all due respect to the great man, although the alliteration and contrast between *minimo* and *maximum* are similar between the two lines, their meaning is distinct: while the graffiti phrase puts the emphasis on *contemnendo*, underscoring the social significance of what is being expressed, Publilius' statement is far vaguer and therefore less pointed. Indeed, the line with which *minimum malum* appears in Herculaneum underscores the idea that the point being made is about how to exist in a competitive social environment, as protecting one's interests is made synonymous with life itself.

Of course, not all of the aphorisms preserved on Pompeian walls relate so directly to the social aspects of Roman life, as (for instance) the senarius found in the peristyle of the House of Holconius Rufus (8. 4. 4), *moram si quaeres, sparge milium et collige* ('If you are looking to waste time, sprinkle millet and pick it up again': *CIL* 4. 2069). The sort of homey domestic wisdom expressed here may remind us of the guest who licks the pot and pan from the collection of epigrams from the basilica cited earlier. More lofty is *CIL* 4. 5370, *qui vitam spernit facile contemnet dei* ('the man who despises life easily spurns god'), found on a column inside 9. 7. 20. But the case of *CIL* 4. 4009 is worth considering: *quam [p]retio a[u]t precibus v[in]citur* ('How it is won by payment or by prayers!'). Another senarius, it seems initially to fit neatly with the idea of a moralizing collection, but it was found on the wall of a *taberna* (1. 4. 6) in company with another version of *amat qui scribet* ('he loves, the one who writes . . .': *CIL* 4. 2360), the obscene verses in comic meter discussed in Chapter 1. Both its obscenity and lack of moralizing content would seem to make *amat qui scribet* an unlikely choice for a compilation of *sententiae*. Indeed, there are other examples from the Pompeian graffiti which may certainly derive from comedic theatre but whose obscenity seems to parody the sententious wisdom such aphorisms are supposed to communicate. Two examples, again from the basilica

wall, are *accensum qui pedicat, urit mentulam* ('he who fucks someone on fire burns his dick': *CIL* 4. 1882) and *qui verpam vissit, quid cenasse illum putes?* ('the man who shits a dick—what would you think he dined on?': *CIL* 4. 1884). Particularly the first of these seems designed to mock the popular insights expressed by other *sententiae* which begin 'the man who . . .',⁸⁴ although at the same time it could certainly also convey the danger of 'getting in bed' with a dangerous ally. The second, too, can be seen as expressing, in obscene terms, the truth that one may know the nature of a person through his 'products'.

Although they use coarse language and images, therefore, we can see these texts too as articulating some wisdom about the Roman social hierarchy. But—at least judging from the collection of Publilius Syrus—their obscenity would seem to make them unfit for inclusion in a moralizing collection. Perhaps the most direct example of this kind comes from Herculaneum, another senarius, which runs *malim me amici fellent quam inimici irrumunt* ('I prefer that my friends suck me off, rather than my enemies make me suck them': *CIL* 4. 10030). The joke here turns on the difference between *fellatio* and *irrumatio* and its social implications: while the former implies a willingness to perform oral sex, the latter implies that the act has been forced on the person carrying it out.⁸⁵ In other words, *fellatio* is something that could happen between friends—albeit not without a certain amount of opprobrium being attached to the one who performs it—while someone who forces *irrumatio* on another is by definition his enemy. But more to the point, the epigram expresses in sexual terms one of the fundamental principles of how friendship worked within the Roman hierarchy: your friends help and support you; your enemies attempt to violate and shame you.

As the collection of Publilius Syrus would lead us to expect, the examples discussed are all senarii. Whether or not they were actually drawn from lost ancient comedies, they at least preserve the illusion that they were.⁸⁶ All certainly seem to work within the tradition

⁸⁴ e.g. Publilius Syrus 555, *qui metuit calamitatem rarius accipit* ('the man who fears disaster rarely experiences it') or 557, *qui pro innocente dicit satis est eloquens* ('the man who speaks on behalf of the innocent is eloquent enough').

⁸⁵ See Adams (1982) 125–7 for a comparison of the meanings of the two acts.

⁸⁶ Again, it will be noted that they all conform to Bentley-Luchs's law, as they would if they were written for stage performance: Fortson (2008) 34–5.

which would associate the senarius with gnomic maxims.⁸⁷ On the other hand, as we have seen with *amat qui scribet*, there was also plenty of scope for the use of the senarius in other ways, as at *CIL* 4. 1877, from the basilica, where it forms a riddle (*zetema*): *mulier ferebat filium sui nec meus est nec mi similat, sed vellem esset meus et ego voleba<m> ut meus esset* ('A woman has born a son of her own; he isn't mine nor does he resemble me, but I wish he was mine and I was wanting him to be mine'). The answer seems to be 'money' (*pecunia*), which can produce interest and thus a child like to itself. Septenarii, another comic iambic meter, are less common but still appear, as in *CIL* 4. 1830, a very obscene verse from the basilica: *futuitur cunnus [pil]ossus multo melius [qu]am glaber | e[ad]em continet vaporem et eadem v[ell]it mentulam* ('a hairy cunt is fucked much better than a bald one | the former holds the moisture and wants the dick'). There is perhaps an echo of the gnomic or sententious tradition in this 'advice', but again, as earlier, it seems unlikely that it appeared in a formal written collection. Rather, it may have come directly from a performance or a written copy of a play. It could also, as is probable of the earlier *zetema*, have simply been part of a popular tradition, handed down orally until someone decided to write it on the wall of the basilica.

One way in which we might be able to distinguish between texts which circulated widely as part of a published work and those which were generated more locally is to look for regional specificity—that is, references which would only make sense in a Pompeian context. As was noted in Chapter 2 of the political texts, it can be difficult to distinguish which things have local significance and which do not, but it is fairly clear that the inclusion of a name at least suggests a real, historical personage who was somehow implicated in the creation of the graffito. Thus, when someone wrote *Felicem Aufidium felicem*

⁸⁷ Although the Pompeian evidence does seem to suggest that there was an association between the senarius and sententiae, we do have a couple of counter-examples in hexameter: *CIL* 4. 6885, *formosa domus domino veneranda futura* ('a lovely house ought to be/will be venerated by its master'), a hexameter which is missing the first syllable of the first foot; and *CIL* 4. 6761, *haec fuerat quaesita dies innoxia famae* ('this had been the sought-after day which was harmless to reputation'). *CIL* 4. 6768, found nearby, needs to be greatly and somewhat improbably emended to render as a hexameter (see Lommatzsch, *CLE* 1931). *CIL* 4. 6820, which also has a possibly sententious tone, is again a hexameter without its final foot: *sic Cotini [or cotini?] voto pos<t> fata novissima* ('thus by the vow of Cotinus after the most recent tribulations . . .').

semper deus faciat ('May god make Aufidius Felix happy!': 4. 6815) on the wall between 6. 16. 4 and 5, he or she at least initially seems to be referring to a specific individual. And, indeed, we do have some evidence that there were Aufidii in Pompeii, although this is the only 'Felix' of whom we have heard. The fact that this is a senarius if we leave out the last word then might lead us to conclude that the verse was composed and written for this context alone. On the other hand, there is clearly a joke encoded in the line, which plays on *felicem/Felicem*; the writer wants the god to make Mr Happy happy, which he already (by definition) is. This does not entirely vitiate the earlier conclusion about local specificity, but it does offer a motivation for the line to exist independently, as a joke rather than a genuine good wish for a specific person. In a similar vein, an elegiac couplet was found outside the Porta Vesuviana (*CIL* 4. 9171) which runs *sic tibi contingat semper florere, Sabina, | contingat forma<e>sisque puella diu* ('May it befall you to flourish always, Sabina; | may it befall your beauty and may you always be a girl'). This could well have been composed for a particular woman named Sabina, but at least part of what makes the text 'poetic' is the double use of the verb with two different constructions, once with a complementary infinitive and once absolutely with a dative object. Moreover, the name Sabina could easily have been replaced with another to speak to a different addressee, although it is true that three-syllable women's names which begin with an iamb are not common in Latin (Corinna is one).⁸⁸

In sum, then, the popular taste for maxims drawn from the theatre may have been one reason for the iambic lines written on walls in Pompeii, but it was certainly not the only one. Nor, indeed, was the 'conversational' meter of the senarius the most popular for the graffiti poets, as it is the hexameter and elegiacs which the wall writers seem to have preferred.⁸⁹ This is particularly interesting because, unlike the comic iambic meter commonly presented to a mass audience through the medium of stage performances, we cannot identify a particular

⁸⁸ Another text which might have circulated with different names inserted is *CIL* 4. 8162: *hic fuimus cari duo nos sine fine sodales | nomina si [quaeris, Caius et Aulus erant]* ('Here we were, two dear eternal friends. If you ask our names, they were Gaius and Aulus'). The supplement to fill out the pentameter illustrates the point: any number of Roman male names could have been inserted.

⁸⁹ Thus, in an article on the popularity of the moralizing senarius, even E. Rawson acknowledges that '[Pompeians] wrote more fragments of hexameters and elegiacs than they did iambs': Rawson (1987) 79–88, at 88.

institutional source for popular knowledge of hexameter and related meters.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, not only does the fact of numerous graffiti epigrams attest to the presence of the elegiac couplet in street culture, it has even been suggested that we may see in certain popular ‘tags’ a direct connection with elite authors. In an article from 1998, Rudolf Wachter contended that graffiti in elegiac couplets, as well as the work of writers of canonical elegies, reflect oral composition and circulation in both their use of language and their metrical patterning.⁹¹ Thus, as Thomas Habinek has emphasized, ‘elite artistic forms, then as now, routinely derive their energy from popular traditions of singing, speaking, dancing, and depicting’.⁹² This is clearly true, although frequently disregarded by scholars, but at the same time it cannot be forgotten that the graffiti which survive from the Campanian cities are written—that is, as much as they may reflect a wider culture of oral practices, they are also the product of at least one individual’s decision to transform them into a physical text. Tension, however, remains in Pompeian graffiti between the lived, and lively, spoken world from which they arose and their own role as more stable, static, inscriptions.

As Wachter notes, this tension is perhaps most visible in instances where we have fairly clear and direct evidence of a common popular source among several different graffiti. One example may be a text which is found three times in Pompeii, an erotic epigram based on a rather contrived conceit: *vellem essem gemma hora non amplius una | ut tibi signanti oscula pressa darem* (‘I wish I was a jewel, for not more than a single hour, | so that I might give kisses, pressed onto it, to you as you sign’). As Antonio Varone explains, the rather convoluted metaphor here is that of a signet ring: the speaker has given it to the addressee, having first pressed his own lips to it; he wishes he were the carved gemstone which forms its centrepiece so that, when she moistens it to seal a letter, he might bestow the kisses on her directly.⁹³ As I noted, the full text is found twice in Pompeii, in two very

⁹⁰ Except, of course, education, which seems to have depended heavily on Virgil and other hexameter texts. But to hypothesize this as a source for Pompeian street culture generally, we would need to make certain assumptions either about the identity of graffiti writers (that they all originated from an elite social milieu) or about the general level of education among the Pompeian populace. For a more systematic discussion about graffiti and education, see the beginning of Chs. 4 and 5.

⁹¹ Wachter (1998) 73–89.

⁹² Habinek (2009) 114–42.

⁹³ Varone (2002) 21.

different material contexts: once inside the House of Maius Castricius, inscribed in a stairwell along with numerous other fragments, both prose and poetry (Solin, *Fab. Ruf.* n. 61); once written on a tomb (n. 23) along the Via Nuceria, where it is preceded by an address to 'Primigenia of Nuceria' (*Primigeniae Nuc(er)inae sal(utem)*): *CIL* 4. 10241). A fragment of what seems to be a variation on the same pentameter was also found outside the *taberna* at 7. 12. 14 (*gemma velim fieri hora non a[. . .]*): *CIL* 4. 1698 with p. 463, 704). We have no way of knowing, of course, the exact source for the verses, although their rather convoluted grammar and contrived central image would not seem to suggest that their original author was not a professional poet at the level of Ovid or Virgil. Indeed, it is even difficult to prove that the text circulated orally, although Wachter makes the case that echoes of the end of the hexameter in canonical poets from Virgil to Juvenal suggest that at least those few words constituted a familiar tag in popular poetry.

One of the noteworthy features of the epigram is its invocation of letter writing—or, at any rate, of some kind of signatory practice in which a woman might be expected to engage. In the example from the Via Nuceria, the combination with a letter salutation certainly leads one to think of epistles. Indeed, it is possible to see this inscription as a play on the metaphor which animates the poem: the writer uses an epigram about the material practices of epistolary writing as the substance of a graffiti 'letter'. This is an example of one way in which the writers of Pompeian graffiti poems were able to take ownership even of text appropriated from elsewhere. This is perhaps more clear in the case of another fragment of graffiti poetry, a hexameter verse which runs *venimus huc cupidi, multo magis ire cupimus* or 'we came here desiring; how much more do we desire to go away'. The line, or fragments of it, have been found all over Pompeii, ten times in all, in material contexts which range from the peristyles of wealthy houses to the walls of cookshops. It was even found in Herculaneum.⁹⁴ More curiously, however, it was twice found in combination with a pentameter to complete the elegiac couplet—but they are two different pentameters. Thus we have (in the peristyle of the house of the Vestals: *CIL* 4. 1227; see Figure 3.6 for a line drawing of the original text):

⁹⁴ In Pompeii (in addition to the examples discussed later): *CIL* 2995, 6697, 8114, 8231, 8891, 9849, 10065a. In Herculaneum: *CIL* 10640.

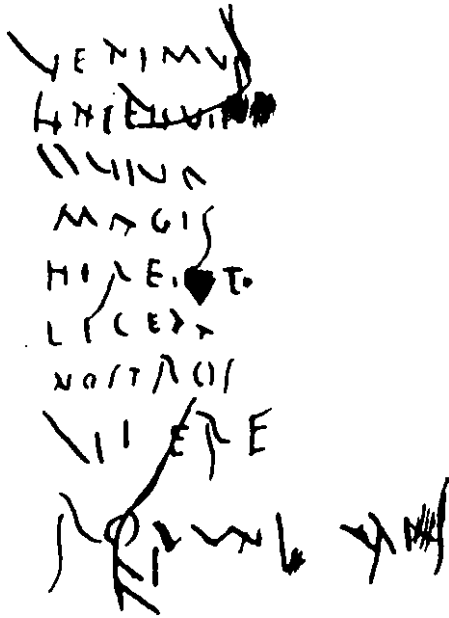


Figure 3.6. Line drawing of *CIL* 4. 1227, from *CIL* vol. 4.

Venimus huc cupi[di], multo magis {h}ire <cupimus>
 ut liceat nostros visere, Roma, Lares

We came here desiring; so much more we desire to go
 so that we might be permitted, Rome, to see our homes.

And in a stairwell of the House of Maius Castricius:⁹⁵

Venimus h[oc c]upidi, multo magis ire cupimus
 sed retinet nostros illa puella pedes

We came here desiring; so much more we desire to go
 but that girl holds back our feet.

Scholars have theorized that one of these represents a quotation from a now-lost original source, while the other is an allusion—which is imagined to be which depends on the scholar. It is true that the two pentameters do bear a striking similarity to each other, which argues that their authors were at least working from the same model: note

⁹⁵ Solin (1975) 252.

the repetition of *nostros* in the same metrical position, and the sound coincidence of *Roma Lares* and *puella pedes*. The aural similarity, especially, may lead us to suspect that whatever words the original employed, the graffiti authors had heard rather than read them.⁹⁶ But even if we would like to postulate a canonical original, we are left with a text which apparently enjoyed an enormous popularity at Pompeii and Herculaneum and has left no other trace in the literary record—by which I mean to suggest that it is odd that the numerous allusions in the graffiti to this hypothetical original are not matched by any allusions in canonical poetry. This does not mean that it was necessarily a ‘popular’ composition in its original form, but it does suggest that it achieved a purchase on the discourse of graffiti which it did not achieve on the discourse of high literature. In other words, I would argue that we have in *venimus huc cupidi* a part of what we might call the graffiti canon, a line of verse which—whether quoted on its own or attached to a pentameter—both is and is intended to be read as popular poetry. Its ‘popularity’, moreover, is evident not just in its repetition, but in the fact that certain individuals felt free to take ownership of it, to make it part of a poem of nostalgia for home on the one hand, and part of a fairly banal erotic couplet on the other. What seems to be important about the hexameter, therefore, is not that it means something in particular, but rather that it can be made to mean different things in the hands of different authors. Whereas quotations from elite canonical literature always contain at least the possibility of invoking the original textual context of the verse, the rootless mobility of *venimus huc cupidi* both makes it especially ripe for appropriation and enables the appropriator to participate in the ongoing creation of the quotation’s significance.⁹⁷

Just as much, therefore, as gnomic statements like *minimum malum* (discussed earlier), *venimus huc cupidi* seems to have been part of the ‘mental furniture’ of those writing graffiti in Pompeii, a phrase whose familiarity echoed popular culture even as individuals were able to add their own words to make a single inscription their own. The same effect, even more widespread, can be seen with a different phrase, found multiple times in different configurations and contexts in Pompeii: *quisquis amat, veniat* (‘whoever loves, let him

⁹⁶ So Wachter (1998) 80–2.

⁹⁷ A point also made by M. Langner in connection with repetition in pictorial graffiti: Langner (2001) 139.

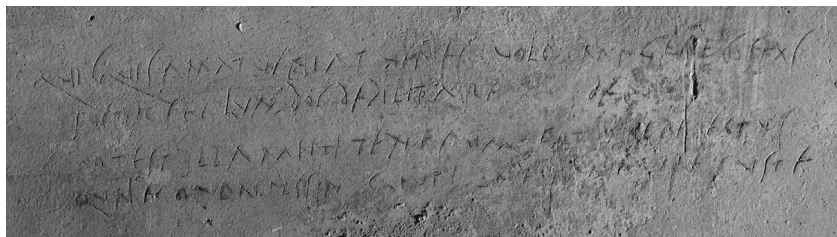


Figure 3.7. Plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 1824. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. Photograph by Luciano Pedicini, enhanced by Sam Woolley.

come’). One example of its usage is another poem from Pompeii’s basilica (*CIL* 4. 1824: see Figure 3.7 for a photograph of the original inscription):

quisquis amat veniat veneri volo <r>angere costas
 fustibus et lumbos debilitare de[ae]:
 si potest illa mihi tenerum pert[u]n[d]ere pectus
 quit ego non possim caput i[ll]ae fran[g]ere fuste?

Whoever loves, let him come: I wish to break the ribs of Venus
 With clubs and to cripple the loins of the goddess:
 If she is able to strike through my tender heart
 why should I not be able to break her head with a stick?

The poem is a play on one of the metaphors common in Latin erotic verse. Venus has ‘struck’ the speaker with passion, and so he (or she) wishes to return the favour, breaking the goddess’s ribs as she has broken his (or her) heart. The poem is clearly influenced by elegy, not just in its description of desire but in the materialized metaphor which recalls (for example) Ovid’s literalized struggle with Cupid in *Amores* 1. 1. The author also seems to have had a weakness for alliteration (*veniat veneri volo; debilitare deae; pertundere pectus; frangere fuste*), and the space between the final words in line 2 may point to the mechanics of composition: the pentameter should end with a two-syllable word consisting of a short and a long, so that *deae* would be a natural choice and might, therefore, have been filled in before the rest of the line was written.⁹⁸ What is curious, however, is

⁹⁸ Of course, the meter falls apart at the end of the second pentameter, where the writer seems to have slipped back into hexameter after the caesura (following *possim*).

the disconnect in sense between the opening tag (*quisquis amat, veniat*) and the rest of the poem: is the author bidding lovers to come and hear his confession? To witness the beating of Venus? Or are they to be the stand-ins for the goddess, and bear the violence of the speaker?

In fact, I would argue, the role of *quisquis amat veniat* at the beginning of *CIL* 4. 1824 is less to communicate a particular invitation to lovers and more to function as a kind of generic marker—a signal to the reader that the author is embarking upon writing an erotic epigram in a ‘popular’ mode.⁹⁹ In fact, *quisquis amat* is found in numerous other places in Pompeii, more than twelve times in various material contexts and attached to various subsequent words and lines. One example is *CIL* 4. 3199, inscribed on a wall near the doorway of House 9. 2. 18: *cuscus amat valeat pereat qui noscit amare* (‘whoever loves, let him be well; let him perish who does not know how to love’). Here we have *valeat* rather than *veniat* as in the basilica poem, but the metrical and sound coincidence is clear, and, although we have a least one other instance of *quisquis amat veniat*, *valeat* is more common.¹⁰⁰ In fact, elsewhere in Pompeii (*CIL* 4. 4659, 4663, 5186) we find *quisquis amat pereat* (‘whoever loves, let him die’), which seems to be a joke on the more familiar phrasing, as *valeat* is replaced with its antonym. In sum, however, it is clear that *quisquis amat*, usually followed by a jussive verb, is a stock phrase in Pompeian graffiti writing—and not one, it should be added, which is ever found in canonical Latin poetry.¹⁰¹ Thus, in the same way that, in canonical poetry, a reference to *arma* automatically creates a link to Virgil, the *Aeneid*, and even epic poetry in general, *quisquis amat* is a ‘citation’ of what we might call a popular canon. The difference is that the value attached to *arma* as an allusion is bound up with the value attached to Rome’s most canonized poem, and the authority of Rome’s most canonized poet. The authority behind *quisquis amat*,

⁹⁹ Indeed, the ‘invitation’ may in context be nothing more than a play upon the etymology of *venio*, which some in antiquity derived from the name *Venus* (Cicero, *de Nat. De.* 2. 69).

¹⁰⁰ *Veniat*: *CIL* 4. 4200, 6782; *valeat*: *CIL* 4. 3199, 4091, 9202; also n. 66 in Solin (1975). *CIL* 4. 5272 has *quisquis amat v[]* which could fit either possibility.

¹⁰¹ Although it is true, that similar phrases (*quisquis amas, si quis amat*) are found in Ovid and Propertius, but they are never followed by the jussive verb as is common in the graffiti. For a list of parallels, see Wachter (1998) 76–9.

on the other hand, is that of the anonymous community of urban street poets.

Apropos, however, of Quintilian's assertion that sometimes culture 'trickles up' (*Inst. Orat.* 5. 11. 37, discussed earlier), it is worth noting one further place in Pompeii where *quisquis amat* is found and where it is given poetic and self-consciously literary weight. Early in Pompeii's excavation history (1755), when it was still called Cività and considered an annex of Herculaneum, a number of paintings were pulled from the middle of the site.¹⁰² One of them depicts a series of instruments associated with writing: a wax tablet, an ink jar and stylus, and an open scroll. On the scroll is written a poem, whose later lines are difficult to decipher but which clearly begins *quisquis | ama(t) valia(t) | peria(t) qui n/oscit ama[re]*.¹⁰³ The presence of *quisquis amat valeat* in this context is suggestive. Of course, we could hypothesize that the painter, left to his own devices and needing some words to fill in his scroll, simply drew on his knowledge of popular song—the same knowledge which inspired the graffiti writers who decorated walls more informally elsewhere in Pompeii. This is not to say that the presence of *quisquis amat* here proves that it originated within an elite context, or even that it was particularly associated with elite culture. It is possible that our painter would have given us a verse from the *Aeneid* had he known one. Yet it is significant, to my mind, that when the painter was seeking words to fill the scroll, he thought of *quisquis amat* and did not, correspondingly, think of 'Servius says hello to Fulvia' or some Latin equivalent of 'have a nice day!' My point is that *quisquis amat* here is not simply words, or simply poetry, but rather is given weight by the artistic environment as 'poetry'—a phrase familiar from a more popular context re-presented here in the place of a canonical text.¹⁰⁴ *Quisquis amat* may have been a convenient tag, therefore, but the painting indicates the ways in which it might at least be imagined as part of a larger literary tradition.

In sum, then, I think we must see in the Pompeian graffiti testimony to a culture of authorship which is distinct from that which

¹⁰² First published in Piroli (1789), tav. 1–9.

¹⁰³ See Figure 3.8 for a photograph.

¹⁰⁴ Note that the poem in the painting appears on the scroll, a reasonably permanent medium, rather than on the wax tablet where one would expect lower-level exercises or drafts to be completed.

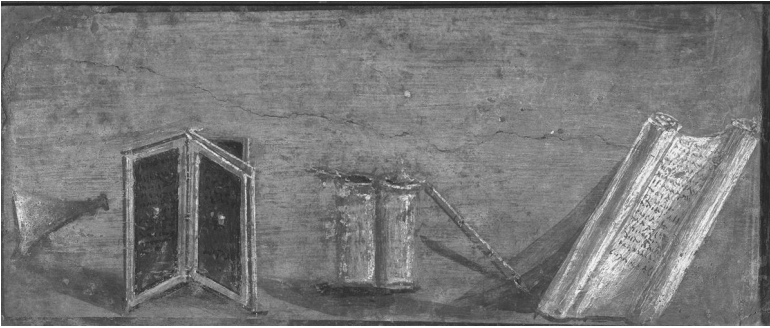


Figure 3.8. Fresco showing writing instruments and scroll. Naples Archeological Museum. Photograph by Luciano Pedicini.

animates the canonical poetry of the period. Of course, as I noted earlier, there is clearly a certain continuity between the allusiveness prized by elite imperial writers and the appropriation and repetition of certain phrases in street poetry. On the other hand, the nature of that poetry means that, instead of reproducing and reifying an individual text with an individual author, graffiti seem to be engaged in the creation of a communal, anonymous idea of the authorial act, one which a wall writer might simultaneously honour and participate in creating. Indeed, the existence of this popular, appropriative model of how one could write poetry might be the source for some of the shrillness found in, for instance, Martial's defence of his proprietary interest in his writings. Especially for the composer of epigrams, whose connection to the popular tradition was unquestionable, it must have been very important to assert allegiance to a higher literary style of authorship.

If, however, we are willing to hypothesize that the graffiti are animated by a kind of communal poetic discourse, it is hard to escape the fact that that discourse is dominated by expressions of eroticism. It is true, as is shown in the two couplets quoted earlier, that the 'desiring' in *venimus huc cupidi* might be construed as erotic or not, depending on what was added to the verse—and, indeed, in the popular second half of the line, *multo magis ire cupimus, cupio* means simply a powerful wish. Yet I would argue that the joke of using the two *cup-* cognates depends on the contrast between their meanings, as the apparently amatory desiring of *cupidi* is transformed

in the powerful wish for freedom in *cupimus*.¹⁰⁵ The mobility of meaning is part of the humour, in the same way that *quisquis amat valeat* could be so easily reversed and reformulated as *quisquis amat pereat*. The fragments' use of amatory language, however, underscores one of the strange paradoxes of the graffiti poetry, namely that they are both strong evidence of, and a clear contribution to, the fact that eroticism was the common language of wall writing in Pompeii. Modern scholars have noted this fact and drawn from it certain conclusions about the identities and obsessions of the citizens of ancient Pompeii. It is true that there is a lot of love and sex in Pompeian wall writing, in the same way that there is a lot of love and sex in Pompeian wall painting—a circumstance which might well lead us to believe that there was some kind of cultural predisposition to erotic representation in the ancient city. Yet recent studies of Pompeian erotic paintings have emphasized how they do not fit modern models of visual pornography and the ways in which they could be marshalled to serve a wide variety of purposes.¹⁰⁶ In the case of the graffiti poetry, however, we have an added generic predisposition towards eroticism, insofar as Latin elegy was clearly one of the most profound influences on their practice. In Chapter 4, I will look at one extended instance of graffiti poetry in an erotic mode, and examine how the type of appropriative authorship described in this chapter could be mobilized by an author to express a very particular and non-normative type of love.

¹⁰⁵ There also seems to be some play in the text between *cupidi/cupimus*, which is etymologically related to Cupid, and *venimus*, which at least some see as the origin of the name Venus (as in Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* 2.69). See Hinds (2006).

¹⁰⁶ Fredrick (1995) 266–88; J. Clarke (1998) 144–240.

Gender and Genre: The Case of *CIL* 4. 5296

The deep and abiding interest of Pompeian graffiti in sex has historically been one of the things which has attracted interest in the Campanian wall texts.¹ Even a notionally public space such as the basilica offered a wide variety of ‘private’ sentiments, which range from the playful—*me]a vita, meae deliciae ludamus, parumper | hunc lectum c[* (‘my life, my darling, let’s fool around for a little while | [...] this bed’: *CIL* 4. 1781)—to the straightforward—*Caesius fidelis amat m[* (‘Caesius loves M[...] faithfully’: *CIL* 4. 1812)—to the gnomic—*nemo est bellus nisi qui amat mul[er]em adu[lescentulus? or adu[lescentulam?* (‘no one is attractive except one who has loved a woman while a boy (?or while she was a young girl?)’: *CIL* 4. 1883). Mixed in are a fair number of insults—e.g. *Narcissus fellator maximus* (‘Narcissus, [you are a] big cock-sucker’: *CIL* 4. 1825a/b)—and the occasional linguistic experiment—*irrumabiliter* (a neologism which means, presumably, ‘face-fuckingably’ or ‘in a manner suggesting the ability to perform fellatio on someone’: *CIL* 4. 1931). Note that even these last categories, which could have taken a number of different forms, cluster around the central erotic theme. The fact that the discourse of Pompeian graffiti is so thoroughly imbued with the language of sex has led scholars in the past to make certain assumptions about Pompeian graffiti writers, or about Pompeians in general: that they were angst-driven adolescents just coming into knowledge of their own sexuality, that they were members of the ‘less refined’ classes for whom such sexual talk was more natural than for the city’s

¹ Indeed, there has arisen a bit of a cottage industry in compilations of titillating fragments, from the scholarly (Varone 2002) to the fantastical (Della Corte 1958) to the downright odd (Vivolo 2001).

elite, or that people in Pompeii simply suffered more keenly from the erotic anxieties which (it is imagined) afflict all of humankind.

Yet, as can be seen even from the small selection of texts from the basilica just quoted, to lump all 'erotic' graffiti together as manifestations of a single discourse is to miss profound differences between them. It is clear, for instance, that sexually based insults were popular in Roman culture, as is shown in Cicero's speeches and Juvenal's *Satires* as much as the Pompeian wall texts. Similarly, the graffiti writers show interest in documenting their names and their (sexual) relationships in the same way that shepherds were doing in the fields of Attica a few hundred years earlier,² and university undergraduates still do today. For my purposes, however, it is more interesting to note that Pompeian graffiti writers show an abiding interest not just in sex, but in love; not just in crude erotic words and images, but in 'poetic' expressions of desire which ring familiar from more overtly literary contexts. For example, CIL 4. 1928 employs both language and themes which are familiar from the canonical elegists: *scribinti mi dictat amor mostratque cupido | [ad?]peream, sine te si deus esse velim* ('Love directs me as I write, and cupid instructs me; | May I die, if I should wish (even) to be a god without you'). Both lines have a strong Ovidian flavour, although neither is a direct quotation: for the hexameter, Gigante suggests *Amores* 2. 1. 38 as the inspiration ('[attend to] songs, which brilliant love recited to me')³ and the pentameter bears some similarity to *Amores* 2. 16. 13–14 ('I would not wish . . . to be in (any) part of heaven without you').⁴ But in truth, both lines express ideas so canonical that it is probably unnecessary to seek out direct allusions.

Yet it is worth taking note of the text's assertion that the experience of love and the writing of love poetry are intertwined with one another. It is not, of course, a particularly original trope, as it is found commonly in Latin lyric, from Horace *Odes* 4. 1, to Propertius 1. 7 and 1. 9, to the famous opening poem of Ovid's *Amores*.⁵ This last

² C. Taylor (2011) 90–109.

³ *Adhibete . . . carmina, pupureus quae mihi dictat Amor*: Gigante (1979) 204 n. 5.

⁴ *Non ego . . . in caeli sine te parte fuisse velim*: Gigante (1979) 204 n. 6.

⁵ The idea of *eros didaskalos* is, of course, a old and popular one in ancient poetry, seen by Conte as one of the major points of contact between Greek tragedy and Latin love lyric: (1986) 121 n. 22. The idea seems to go back to Euripides' *Hippolytos Kalyptomenos* (Nauck fr. 430). For other instances of the motif in Greek and Latin poetry, see McKeown (1989) 7–10. Cf. Dimundo (2000) 9–34.

example seems especially close to the fragment just quoted, since it employs a similar joke on the role of 'love' as both emotional inspiration and imagined personified co-author. Ovid, however, imagines Cupid as a playful adversary, who steals a foot from his poetic meter in order that the poet should compose elegy rather than epic; the anonymous graffiti author, on the other hand, sees the boy-god as guiding and instructing the author's creation of the text. Indeed, this point is driven home by the participle in the hexameter, placed prominently as the line's first word: *scribinti*, which serves to underscore the idea that it is not just poetic composition which is at issue, but also more concretely the act of creating poetry's material form. This is not to say that the canonical elegists never refer to themselves as 'writers' or their poetic practice as 'writing', although in truth they more commonly employ higher terms, such as *vates* for poet and *cano* for composition.⁶ Yet the use of *scribo* here in a graffiti has different, perhaps greater, force than when it is found in more traditional poetic texts, whose written form is by this point in Latin literary history an indispensable and natural aspect of publication. In the quoted couplet, in contrast, *scribinti* stands out, first by calling attention to the (perhaps transgressive) act of inscription which produced the graffiti, and secondly by insisting that this text emerges in a written rather than an oral context.

Perhaps, however, we should say that it represents itself as emerging in a context which includes both written and oral elements. The image employed in *scribinti mi dictat amor mostratque cupido* is (I would argue) that of the god as schoolmaster, who repeats to his students texts for them to copy out; the written product would then be submitted to the master for correction.⁷ In ancient elementary education, sometimes these would be passages of the teacher's own composition, but perhaps more commonly they were prose and poetic texts taken from elsewhere: both Horace and Persius decry the practice of using contemporary poetry for dictation in schools, and Horace similarly notes in the letter to Augustus that even though he well remembers the old verses of the poet Livius dictated to him as

⁶ e.g. When Cupid imposes the experience of love and the act of writing love poetry on Ovid in *Amores* 1. 1, '*quod' que' canas, vates, accipe' dixit' opus'* (and 'take, poet,' he said, 'the work which you will sing': 24). Ovid only uses *scribo* widely in the *Heroides*, in which (as in the Pompeian graffiti) the word serves to emphasize the physicality of the of the heroines' poetic letters.

⁷ Bonner (1977) 177.

a boy, they still cannot be considered great poetry.⁸ In sum, the introductory image in the graffito couplet takes us to an originary educational site, where not only was literacy learned, but where most young men of a certain class first encountered canonical texts. It might therefore be argued that the image used here is an indicator that the writer of this text was formally educated, one of those young men rich and fortunate enough to have studied with a schoolmaster. But more generally, we might also say that the significance of this fragment lies in its evocation not just of the schoolroom, but of the schoolroom as a place of textual consumption and repetition. The image of love as a schoolmaster, expressed in an elegiac couplet, is not just an index of literary literacy, but also suggests one conduit through which that literacy flowed.

My point is that if, as Pierre Bourdieu remarked about aesthetic judgement in the modern day, ‘the “eye” is a product of history reproduced by education’,⁹ ancient teaching practices may be responsible not just for the fact that Pompeian graffiti writers wrote, but also what and in what manner they thought it worthwhile to write. The brevity and aphoristic tone of many of the poetic graffiti inscriptions may thus not just reflect the importance of epigram in popular poetic discourse, but also point to the manner in which poetry was commonly first learned—as, that is, short, pithy fragments which might be easily copied and remembered. We have significant material evidence of this practice from Graeco-Roman Egypt, such as, for instance, the tablet from a cemetery on which the teacher has written a hexameter line (‘Begin, good hand, beautiful letters, and a straight line’) along with the admonition ‘now, you imitate it!’ The student has dutifully copied out below both verse and final command.¹⁰ Although this example appears to represent the schoolmaster’s own poetic composition, we also have numerous instances of phrases from canonical poets being used as copy-models.¹¹ Much of our evidence for this relates to education in Greek, so that we know Menander was especially popular, but Latin poets too (especially ‘antique’ ones such

⁸ Persius 1. 29–30; Horace *Sat.* 1. 10. 74–5 and *Epist.* 2. 1. 71, *memini quae mihi parvo Orbilium dictare* (‘I remember what Orbilius dictated to me when I was young’). For the use of dictation in teaching rhetoric, including the need for the teacher sometimes to create his own texts, see Quintilian, *Inst.* 2. 4. 12–13.

⁹ Bourdieu (1984) 3.

¹⁰ Cited and discussed in Criore (1996) no. 136; (2001) 133.

¹¹ Criore (2001) 134–5.

as Ennius and Terence) were mined for pithy and memorable phrases.¹² Quintilian recommends that such passages be chosen for their sound moral message, since he expects that boys will remember them into old age and have their characters shaped by their content; in a less serious vein, he also notes that the work of the poets is especially good for such exercises because 'learning them is more pleasing to children' (*namque eorum cognitio parvis gratior est: Inst. 1. 36. 2*).

Quintilian's suggestion that passages were selected for their potentially beneficial effect on character development may seem to make an odd fit with the cheerful eroticism of many of the Pompeian graffiti epigrams. I have already noted his general dislike of the Roman elegists as sources for elementary education, and although he endorses lyric in general, he adds the codicil that it should only be taught 'if . . . you distinguish not only among the genre's authors but also select out parts of their works' (*si . . . in iis non auctores modo sed etiam partes operis elegeris: Inst. 1. 8. 6*). He adds that even Horace contains some risqué passages which he, as a teacher, refuses to explicate to his students. Yet, although Quintilian insists upon the moral motivation behind the practice of selection, his description of ancient educational practices does seem to fit with the—for lack of a better phrase—fragmentary aesthetic which seems to animate the Pompeian graffiti. This is to say that, in the modern day, we are taught to read poems both ancient and modern as organic units which move from a beginning, to a middle, to an end. Indeed, as classical scholars we have over the past decades shown great interest in how poems begin and end, as well as whether texts transmitted to us as single poems should not, in fact, be considered a combination of two or more. I would by no means argue that such questions are out of keeping with ancient poetic interests; I would simply like to highlight the fact that outside of elite literary circles, both reading and writing practices in the ancient world often put the focus on much smaller pieces of poems. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter 3, language and sentiments which meant one thing in their original textual contexts could easily be redeployed to mean something different when quoted elsewhere: thus, for instance, the lines from Propertius 2. 5 ('now anger is fresh, now is the time to go away: once pain has faded, believe me, love will return') which appeared on a street

¹² Bonner (1977) 174–7.

wall outside 6. 13. 19 may well be expressing a general principle (time heals) rather than the erotic angst Propertius was trying to communicate when he wrote them.¹³ Individual lines and combinations of lines from longer poems, therefore, might be seen to have a particular artistic or inspirational life of their own which has not been explored in modern scholarship on particular ancient poets.

As a case study of this graffiti aesthetic, its uses and abuses, this chapter will focus on one important and difficult text from Pompeii, CIL 4. 5296. As will be noted, many different accounts of this brief love poem have been produced during the 120-plus years since its discovery—accounts which variously describe its meaning, location, and literary significance. As one of the longest and most elaborate graffitied texts to have survived from the ancient city, it has been rightly understood as an important potential window onto the urban writing culture which produced Pompeii and Herculaneum's thousands of parietal inscriptions. At the same time, however, it and its scholarly history also show how problematic graffiti poetry can be, as the cheerful and inscrutable remnants of a textual practice to which traditional critical tools are difficult to apply. By taking a closer look at CIL 4. 5296, and interrogating both it and some of the assumptions which have been made about it, we will gain a better understanding of Pompeii's literary street scene and the language of love in which it conversed.

NO PLACE FOR A WOMAN: IN SEARCH OF THE FEMALE VOICE OF CIL 4. 5296

In 1888, as they excavated a narrow alley in Pompeii's ninth region, Italian archaeologists uncovered a seven-line love poem scratched into the plaster wall of a narrow entrance hallway.¹⁴ Since they had

¹³ *Nunc est ira recens, nunc est [discedere tempus] | si dolor afuerit, crede, redibit [amor]: CIL 4. 4491 (= Propertius 2. 5. 9–10).* The editors of CIL make the suggestive observation that the two lines seem to have been written in different hands, which raises the possibility that this is an instance of 'verse capping' in which a second person completes the quotation started by someone else. If this is true, it would point more strongly to the appearance of these verses in some kind of sententious context, educational or otherwise.

¹⁴ See Figure 4.1 and Plates 7–8 for a line drawing and photographs of the original text, now in the storerooms of the Naples Archaeological Museum.

not yet excavated the interiors of the buildings, they did not know what lay beyond this hall—but the graffito as a text was interesting enough that it was published with a brief commentary in the year’s summary excavation report. Antonio Sogliano, the author of the report, confined himself to noting the oddities of the poem’s meter and a few literary parallels for its phraseology. As to its author, or the circumstances of its inscription in the doorway, he had only one comment: ‘it is a woman who speaks’.¹⁵

Sogliano’s statement stands as the mild beginning of what would quickly become the tormented critical history of the Pompeian fragment, now known as *CIL* 4. 5296. Over the next century, more and more elaborate narratives would be spun around the text and its author as critics debated what the poem might mean, who might have written it, and how it came to be inscribed in the hallway in which it was found. The text as it was originally published by Sogliano appears here:

O utinam liceat collo complexa tenere
 brac<ch>iola et teneris || oscula ferre label<l>is.
 i nunc, ventis tua gaudia, pupula, crede. ||
 Crede mihi, levis est natura virorum.
 Saepe ego cu<m> media || vigilare<m> perdita nocte,
 haec mecum medita<ri>s:¹⁶ multos || Fortuna quos supstulit alte
 hos modo proiectos subito || praecipitesque premit.
 Sic Venus ut subito coiunxit || corpora amantum,
 dividit lux et se . . .¹⁷

Oh, would that it were permitted to grasp with my neck your little arms
 as they entwine [it] and to give kisses to your delicate little lips.
 Come now, my little darling, entrust your pleasures to the winds.

¹⁵ A. Sogliano, in *Notizie degli scavi* (1888), 519.

¹⁶ I use the text as published in the original excavation report, Sogliano, in *Notizie degli scavi* (1888) 519, which emends *meditas* to *meditaris*, since the verb—as we have it in classical Latin—is deponent. Mau (1889), 100–25, at 122–3, suggested *meditans* instead, which has been widely accepted. I prefer, however, to read *cum* (line 5) as a conjunction, introducing a dependent clause containing the subjunctive *vigilarem*; thus *meditaris* is required in line 6 in order to provide a main verb for the sentence. It is common in vulgar Latin generally, and in the Pompeian graffiti particularly, to find non-deponent forms of deponent verbs: e.g. *CIL* 4. 2445, *testifico* for *testificor*; 4. 4456, *tutat* for *tutatur*; 4. 3494i, *rixsatis* for *rixamini*.

¹⁷ In the final line, the letters *se* are clearly visible following *et*, but since the sentence is unfinished it is impossible to know whether they are a word in their own right (the reflexive pronoun in the accusative or ablative) or the beginning of a new word such as *seiungit*.

(En)trust me, the nature of men is insubstantial.
 Often as I have been awake, lovesick, at midnight,
 you think on these things with me: many are they whom Fortune lifted
 high;
 these, suddenly thrown down headlong, she now oppresses.
 Thus, just as Venus suddenly joined the bodies of lovers,
 daylight divides them and if(?)

On the surface, there is nothing inherently obscure about *CIL* 4. 5296. The text's orthography is comparatively neat, its spelling is reasonably regular, and the words are helpfully divided from one another by raised dots or 'interpuncts'. As is frequent in Pompeian poetic graffiti, the inscribed lines do not follow the metrical schema, so that the text originally written on the wall in seven lines resolves itself into a poem of nine—but the effort required to make the transition is not great, and the meter, although not entirely regular, is still fairly clear. Scholars are divided on the question of whether *meditas* in line 6 should be understood as a mistake for *meditans* or *meditaris*; since the former would leave the sentence without a main clause, it seems more likely that the author provides the non-deponent form of the verb, as is common in Pompeian graffiti. Particularly noteworthy is line 5, which becomes a perfectly rendered hexameter as long as we are willing to provide an 'm' for the end of *vigilare* to agree with the expressed subject of the sentence, *ego*. Like the use of a non-deponent form for a deponent verb, the loss of final 'm' is a common feature of so-called vulgar Latin. Following the final line of the poem is another line that appears to read *paries quid ama*—a sentiment which has been variously interpreted. It seems more than

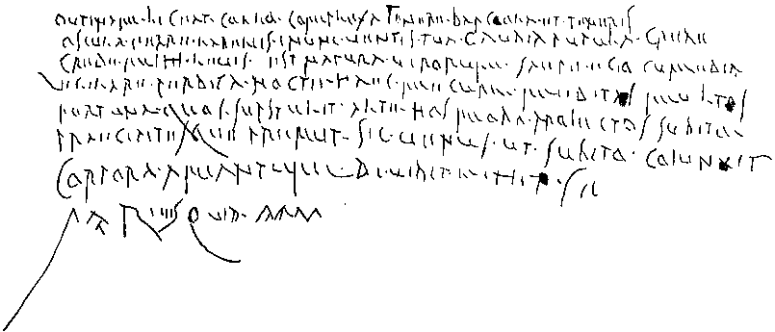


Figure 4.1. Line drawing of *CIL* 4. 5296, from *CIL* vol. 4. suppl. 2.

likely, however, that it is an abbreviated quotation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 4. 73, in which Pyramus and Thisbe lament 'Wall, why do you stand in the way of lovers?' (*Paries, quid amantibus obstas?*). Fortunately or unfortunately, it is written in what is clearly a different hand from that of the main text: the P, A, S, and Q are noticeably dissimilar in formation to those written in the lines above. To my mind, then, it is best to see this phrase as a joking response to the love poem inscribed above it on the wall, a kind of metatextual joke on the phenomenon of graffiti which is seen elsewhere in Pompeii.

It is not, however, particular textual difficulties which have made CIL 4. 5296 so problematic. Rather, much of the controversy has been spawned by the two words underlined in the Latin passage, both of which are clear in the original text and which conform reasonably well with the grammatical and metrical patterns of the poem. The difficulty arises when we realize that the poem appears not only to be expressed in the voice of a woman but also to be addressed to one: first, in line 3, the feminine vocative *pupula* (translated 'my little darling') seems to indicate that the addressee of the poem is female; second, the feminine nominative participle of line 5, *perdita* or 'lovesick', agrees with *ego* in the same line. Thus the speaker—of this line at least—also appears to be a woman.

Of the scholarly narratives created over the years to address this 'queer' circumstance, the vast majority have attempted to explain it away.¹⁸ Some have argued that *perdita* is ablative, agreeing with *nocte* rather than *ego*, so that the poem's speaker may indeed have been masculine;¹⁹ correspondingly, others have insisted that *pupula* is addressed, not to the beloved object of the poem, but to the poet's own spirit, so that the person for whom the speaker pines may be a man rather than a woman.²⁰ Still others postulate a change of speaker between lines 2 and 3: *pupula* then becomes an address to the speaker from her (presumed male) beloved, so that we are again free to imagine a couple of two different sexes.²¹ And last but by no means least is the popular theory that the graffiti's gender trouble is the result of 'an accident of transcription', the speaker's imperfect

¹⁸ Varone (2002) 98–101 provides a full list of publications. I only cite relevant examples in what follows.

¹⁹ Della Valle (1937), 162–3; cf. Magaldi (1930) 17–18.

²⁰ e.g. Lindsay (1960) 116: 'A girl's poem without a doubt . . . she has intruded the poppet in an address to herself and then hoped it would read as a generalization.'

²¹ Della Corte (1958) 70–1.

understanding of the poem which she or he was copying out being embodied in his or her inability to represent ‘correctly’ the sexes of the people involved.²² Such is the infinite cycle of ‘solutions’ produced for the riddle of *CIL* 4. 5296, as critics have sought to resolve the conflict between the text in question and their own assumptions about gender, sexuality, and poetic production in antiquity. In this way, the Pompeian graffito has become a ‘difficult’ text, continuously reread and rewritten in order to fit particular disciplinary paradigms of women’s experience in ancient Rome.

It is notoriously difficult—some would say impossible—to ‘prove’ female authorship of an ancient text, still more difficult to ‘prove’ female readership, no matter what vocative may be used. The ongoing debate over the authorship of the Sulpician poems in the Tibullan corpus testifies to the first point, as critics attempt to define how we would tell the difference between a poem actually by a woman from a poem which simply pretends to be by a woman.²³ Such discussions frequently wander into dangerous territory, since they inevitably come back to the question of to what extent we may read, not only the author’s reality, but her *biological* reality through the medium of a literary work. Epigraphic texts such as funerary epitaphs give us better, or at least more immediate, access to certain voices marginalized in the literary canon, but they too have their difficulties. No comprehensive study of female-authored texts in Pompeian graffiti exists, in part because we simply have no way of knowing the gender of most of the people who wrote on ancient walls; even when a woman’s name is written, the assumption is generally that a (male) admirer, or enemy, of hers wrote it rather than that she wrote it herself. Thus, for instance, the House of Maius Castricius contains several graffitied instances of the name ‘Romula’, including the assertion *Romula cum suo hic habitat* and *Romula cum suo hic fel(l)at et ubique*—yet, in the original publication of the inscriptions, Carlo Giordano insisted that the name must be a joking use of the diminutive to refer to the goddess Roma, and the final sentence a political insult rather than a sexual boast.²⁴ Under such

²² Copley (1939) 333–49, at 339–42; Gigante (1979) 212–15.

²³ On which see Holzberg (1999), 169–91. Cf. Milnor (2002), 259–82.

²⁴ Giordano (1966) 80–1. To be fair, in a subsequent publication of the same material, H. Solin calls this reading of the ‘Romula’ material ‘an abuse of the naked onomastic facts’: (1975) 247.

circumstances, it is difficult to know what *would* constitute definitive evidence of a female writer.

Yet even those most sceptical about literacy among Roman women acknowledge that at least some women could read and write, and although we certainly have evidence that elite women often relied upon scribes to do their writing for them, it is not at all clear whether this was by necessity or choice.²⁵ The letters found at Vindolanda in Britain from Claudia Severa, wife of a military officer of the equestrian class, were written by an amanuensis, but Severa was still able to append notes in her own neat and confident hand. Indeed, as I noted in Chapter 3, the form of letter salutations—'X gives a greeting to Y—is widely used in Pompeian graffiti, and is useful in this context because it offers not just the name of the imagined audience for the text, but that of its ostensible author as well. There are a number of texts which consist simply of a woman's name in the nominative, another name in the dative, and a form of *salutem*.²⁶ Again, we have no way of knowing whether the person or persons named in the texts are actually those involved in its writing and/or reading—but it is certainly special pleading to imagine that they are not who they say they are simply because a woman's name is involved.

Among the small number of ancient literary texts which refer to the practice of graffiti writing, we do have one which refers to women's participation in this form of public discourse. One of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* depicts the trouble stirred up by some malicious graffiti: Melitta's lover Charinus leaves her because he has seen 'Melitta loves Hermotimus' and 'Hermotimus the shipmaster loves Melitta' written on a wall near the Dipylon Gate (*Dial. Meretr.* 4. 3). Similarly, in *Dial. Meretr.* 10. 5, Chelidonium is

²⁵ Harris (1989) 262–3 says that the failure of any woman to write her own receipt to the banker L. Caecilius Iucundus 'strikes a sinister note' (i.e. suggests that very few women, even those with considerable monetary means, could write). On the other hand, we may note that Sulpicia Lepidina in the Vindolanda writing tablets used the services of a scribe even though she could herself write: Bowman and Thomas (1994) 256–65, nos. 291–4.

²⁶ Examples include CIL 4. 3905, 4639, 6755, 8270, and 8888. If this list seems short, note that I have only included texts in which a) the names of both addressee and addresser are provided and b) the reading of the names is fairly certain. There are many graffiti which consist simply of a woman's name, and others where the gender of the parties cannot be determined. Also noteworthy is 8321 that, in one reading, is a 'note' from Chloe to Eutythia that accuses the latter of caring more for another: Varone (2002) 102.

concerned that her lover's teacher wants to keep him for himself, so she plans to write 'Aristaenetus is corrupting Clinias' in the Cerimicus where she is sure the boy's father will see it. Although these incidents take place in Lucian's fictionalized Athens, they nevertheless show that the idea of women's participation in graffiti writing and reading was by no means out of the question. Moreover, it is noteworthy that, in these particular instances, the graffito which contains Melitta's name is represented as having been written by the admirer himself, but the text which Chelidonium is threatening to post contains only the names of two men and no linguistic indication that it is by a woman's hand. Lucian's representation of popular inscriptive practices thus serves as a warning against reading too much about the identities of ancient graffiti writers through the content of their writings.

The idea, therefore, that we might find women's writing among the many thousands of preserved graffiti from the Bay of Naples should not be dismissed out of hand. Of course, *CIL* 4. 5296 is not just graffiti, but 'literary' graffiti: although the meter of the text is not well constructed in many places, its ambition to be hexameter—or something like it, such as elegiac couplets—is clear, not just from the three lines which scan correctly (1, 5, and 8) but in the fact that all but one of the complete lines ends in the requisite dactyl-and-spondee combination. The literary pedigree of *CIL* 4. 5296, however, has represented an additional stumbling block to those who would see it as authored by a woman. G. P. Goold expresses the traditional view:

With the realization that the graffito does not reflect a real-life situation disappears all likelihood that it was composed or inscribed by a girl. We have no evidence that girls participated in formal education beyond a rudimentary level, whereas speeches on the lips of women abound in literature written by men from Homer to Heliodorus. True, we have in the Corpus Tibullianum a charming set of elegiacs written by a *culta puella*: but Sulpicia is unique, and the odds against female authorship of our poem must be deemed overwhelming.²⁷

Of course, the point may be made that Sulpicia is unique precisely because texts like *CIL* 4. 5296 have been excluded from consideration. But Goold's point is that ancient male authors often impersonated women, and Roman male poets in particular were known to make

²⁷ Goold (1998) 16–29, at 20–1.

enthusiastic use of 'cross-dressing' as a literary conceit, Ovid's *Heroides* being the most famous and extended example. Why, then, should we believe that the grammatically female speaker of the Pompeian fragment was actually a woman?

By way of beginning it is important to note that the Pompeian fragment is not, in fact, a literary text in the same way as Ovid's *Heroides*. When Ovid 'pretends' to be a woman, he does so in full knowledge that the reader will recognize the joke; surely there was no one in antiquity who genuinely thought the poems which form the *Heroides* actually represented the words of the women reported in the text to have composed them. Similarly, when Homer offers a speech by Andromache, he does so within a narrative frame which clearly indicates that she is simply a persona taken up and given voice by the poet, who is not only gendered male by tradition but was actually in the first instance represented in the person of a male rhetor. The point is that male authors in antiquity were happy to play women, but they did so in contexts which guaranteed that the pretence would be discovered, and that the audience would thus be able to see and appreciate the artistry which went into constructing the mask. *CIL* 4. 5296, on the other hand, emerges from and within an entirely different generic framework. This is not to deny that it, like many literary graffiti, has clear connections to the larger world of Roman poetry and poetic composition. The problem is that our understanding of those connections is limited by our lack of knowledge about the ways in which Roman literature was heard, understood, and used beyond the echelons of the cultural elite. Despite the best efforts of scholars such as N. Horsfall and M. Gigante, we still have only the vaguest idea of what role poetry played in Roman culture in the largest sense, as it happened at the level of the street. This means that we do not currently have a means of reading the gendered voice in graffiti poetry, because we do not understand the compositional context, broadly construed, within which they were made. In order to understand the gender identifications encoded in *CIL* 4. 5296, therefore, as well as how it functions more generally as work of poetry, we need to have a better sense of why the text looks the way it does, where it came from, and how it ended up where it ultimately did.

Perhaps the first thing to note is that, unlike literary texts which have been polished smooth by their passage from hand to hand in the textual tradition, graffiti have an intimate and direct connection with those who wrote them. This is not to say that the person who

inscribed 5296 on the wall was its ‘author’ in the same sense that we say Virgil was the author of the *Aeneid*. There is significant evidence that many of the poetic fragments found on Pompeian walls originated in other media, either written texts or ‘popular’ oral performances. Thus, those who first composed the verses may very well not been those who inscribed them. It would be a mistake, however, to underestimate the role of the inscriber in the creation of the text as we have it: in the same way that, for instance, the artists who painted the frescoes on the walls of elite houses were often working from models and yet were able to imprint their own style on individual images, so too those who wrote poetic graffiti were not mere copyists. Even if the writers were transcribing bits and pieces of poetry which circulated orally through the ancient city, it is clear that those responsible for creating the inscribed versions not only chose what to inscribe but seem to have had some influence over the shape of the written text.

One often-cited but little-discussed example is *CIL* 4. 5092, a love poem in iambic senarii, found inscribed on the wall of an outdoor dining room in House 9. 5. 11. See Figure 4.2 for a line drawing of the original text.

Amoris ignes si sentires mulio
 Magi<s> properares, ut videres Venerem.
 Diligo [[puerum]] ‘iuvenem’ venustum. Rogo, punge, iamus.
 Bibisti: iamus, prende lora et excute,
 Pompeios defer, ubi dulcis est amor
 Meus es . . .

If you were feeling the fires of love, mule driver,
 You would hurry more, in order to see Venus.
 I love a lovely boy [corrected to: young man]. I ask you, strike your
 whip, let’s go.
 You have drunk: let’s go, take up the reins and shake them.
 Carry (me) to Pompeii, where love is sweet.
 You are mine . . .

The meter and the colloquial *iamus* (for *eamus*) both point to a close relationship with popular verse, and the reference to Pompeii suggests a local origin—although, obviously, this is not a ‘real’ exhortation to a mule driver, since the inscription was written by someone already well within the city’s walls. One of the curious things about this text, however, is the correction of *puerum* to *iuvenem* by what appears to be the same hand. Metrically, there is nothing to

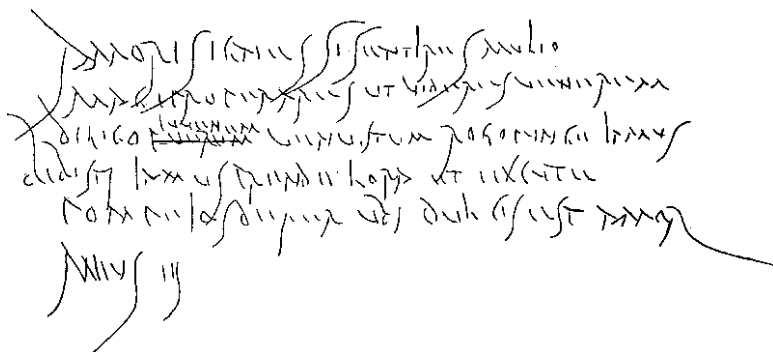


Figure 4.2. Line drawing of CIL 4. 5092, from CIL vol. 4. suppl. 2.

distinguish the two words, and scholars have generally attributed the change to a shift in the way the writer wished to identify the object of desire: Varone says ‘*iuvenem* has replaced *puerum*, favoring the view that the writer is a man, not a woman’.²⁸ The implication behind this assertion, that *puer* would have been used by a woman and *iuvenem* by a man, is difficult to sustain; canonical literature offers numerous examples of men who desire *pueri* and women who express love for *iuvenes*. More likely, I would argue, is a ‘literary’ explanation. The assonance in *vi/ve* sounds at the end of line 2 (*ut videres Venerem*) is picked up in line 3 by *venustum* and, once the change of wording was made, by *iuvenem*; moreover, although *puerum* suits the meter and the meaning, and its ‘u’ sounds may pick up the later ‘u’ in the next word, the double ‘e’ in *iuvenem* makes a better aural bridge between *Venerem* and *venustum*. Since this is the only version of this text to be preserved, we cannot know what it originally said, or even if there was a recognized ‘original’ of the song. My point is simply that *puerum* was at least at some point acceptable to the writer as a rendering of line 3; she or he emended it either upon remembering a different version or when a better word came to mind. One way or another, however, the text shows the effect of the writer on the particular form of a graffito text.

Thus, although it is important never to lose sight of the popular oral verse culture of which the graffiti are traces, we should also not forget the role of the individual writer in shaping particular fragments

²⁸ Varone (2002) 19, f. 1.

of text. In the case of *CIL* 4. 5296, this means crediting the person who inscribed it with a certain deliberation, at least in regard to the female genders ascribed to writer and addressee, rather than attributing what we do not understand to ‘accidents of transcription’. After all, if it was common in ancient writing to misidentify one’s own or others’ sexes, there is no evidence of it in Pompeian graffiti: although Latin nouns occasionally shifted from masculine to feminine in vulgar usage, we have no evidence that people did so. In fact, it is worth noting the evidence of a line included in *CIL* 4. 1837 which has long been recognized as a version of a verse found in Ovid’s *Heroides*: *quam sine te cogis vivere, coge mori* in the original has become *er]go coge mori, quem sine te vivere cogis*. The lines mean essentially the same thing—‘so force to die the one whom you force to live without you!’—with the graffiti’s additions and rearrangement being motivated by the necessities of transforming a pentameter into a hexameter. For our purposes, however, it is significant that the feminine *quam* in the original, necessary because the poem is in the voice of the woman Briseis, has been changed in the graffiti to *quem*, the masculine reflecting the male gender of the speaker/writer. Elsewhere in Pompeii, therefore, writers were perfectly capable of representing gender ‘correctly’, even to the point of emending whatever text they were using to suit their own particular needs. Moreover, at the most basic level of grammar, *CIL* 4. 5296 is fairly coherent. There is no reason to imagine that its author erred, and erred both badly and consistently, in the attributions of gendered participles and nouns.

METER AND MATERIAL

A difficulty arises, however, in that 5296’s coherence at the level of grammar is not matched by a similar neatness at the level of meter or sense. Metrically, as I noted, the text has clear affiliations with hexameter: lines 1, 5, and 8 all scan perfectly. Line 3 could also become a hexameter with the simple edition of *et* between *i nunc* and *ventis*. Line 2, moreover, begins with a well-rendered half-pentameter and, in fact, could become a whole pentameter proper, were we to replace the final word *labellis* with its synonym *labris*. In other words, it is easy to see the first three lines of the poem as an imperfectly remembered quotation from elsewhere: an opening couplet, in

which a closely related word has been accidentally substituted for another, followed by a hexameter in which an incidental monosyllable has been left out. Line 4, however, 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. Line 5 is another hexameter, but line 6 begins with a half-pentameter, which falls apart after *meditas*; oddly but tellingly, however, the line ends with the dactyl and spondee combination (*supstulit alte*) which would mark a hexameter. Line 7 seems initially to have the opposite problem—it begins as what looks like hexameter but ends with a half-pentameter—until we see that if we omit *subito*, the line scans as a pentameter. Finally, line 8 scans as another hexameter, while the unfinished line 9 may begin with another half-pentameter, as long as we are willing to read the last syllable in *dividit* as short rather than long (as it should be before *lux*).

What are we to make of this strange hotchpotch of metrical formations? In his 1939 article on CIL 4. 5296, F. O. Copley insists that the prevailing view—that the original from which the text is derived was couched in elegiac couplets—cannot be sustained: too much violence must be done to lines 4–7 to make them fit neatly into an alternating hexameter–pentameter pattern. In response to this, G. P. Goold has noted that it is not unusual in popular Latin verse to find elegiac distiches and hexameters jumbled together, and that when Petronius presents some of Trimalchio's compositions, he twice has a hexameter followed by another hexameter and pentameter. As he remarks, this is probably in part due to the fact that 'many an amateur elegist [found] the restrictions of the verse-form impossibly exacting'.²⁹ This seems very likely to be true, but we might add to this the evidence of CIL 4. 9847,³⁰ a pair of hexameters quoted from well-known elegiac poets: *Candida me docuit nigras o[di]sse puellas | otero si potero si non invitus amabo*. Propertius 1. 1. 4–6 is the source for the first line (*Amor . . . donec me docuit castas odisse puellas | improbus*) and the second is a direct quotation from Ovid's *Amores* (3. 11. 35). The epigrammatic and erotic nature of the text would seem most naturally to call for a pentameter and hexameter

²⁹ Goold (1988) 25.

³⁰ Also found elsewhere in Pompeii: CIL 4. 1520 with add. p. 208; cf. 1523, 1526, 1528, 3040. For a broader discussion of these texts, see Ch. 1.

combination instead of the double hexameter we are provided; since both Propertius' *Monobiblos* and Ovid's *Amores* are written in elegiac couplets, moreover, they could certainly have provided the composer of this distich with a pentameter to complete it. Yet not only does the double hexameter here not seem to have worried the writer of 4. 9847, the text was popular enough to have been quoted at least once elsewhere in the ancient city without alteration.

Indeed, the lines taken from Propertius and Ovid and reproduced on Pompeian walls as a unified verse point to a further explanation of CIL 4. 5296's metrical anomalies. Part of Copley's difficulty in seeing the text as derived from an original in elegiac couplets was that he was committed to finding a single poetic source for it. Since line 4, in particular, is not easily transformed into a pentameter, and he was rightly resistant to hypothesizing an entire omitted line, he abandoned the idea of an elegiac original. But what if, as is seen in CIL 4. 9847 and in several other places in Pompeian graffiti, the 'original' text of 5296 was not one but several? What if 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? One of the merits of this account is that it would explain not only the metrical oddities of the text but also its sometimes opaque meaning: despite Copley's assertion that 'the graffito as a whole is clear and logical in thought',³¹ there are at the very least 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. If the different sections were derived from different sources, it would certainly help to explain why they seem to coexist oddly side by side in the same text.

Supporting this hypothesis, we may note that, in addition to the Propertius/Ovid quotations joined in CIL 4. 9847 and 1520, there is evidence elsewhere in Pompeii—discussed in Chapter 3—that individual poetic fragments could be combined in different permutations to express different ideas. The point is that whereas modern literary critics are accustomed to thinking of a poem as a unique and unified whole, certain poems in Pompeii seem to have been composed—at least in part—from lines already in existence, which could be adopted

³¹ Copley (1939) 338.

and used in different contexts to mean different things. The verses which formed CIL 4. 5296 do not appear elsewhere in Pompeii, and may, therefore, represent a slightly less ‘popular’ selection of poetry, but the compositional technique may well have been the same. This idea—that CIL 4. 5296 was derived ultimately from several different sources—has, in fact, been suggested in passing, but its implications for the meaning of the text, in particular its impact on the role of the lesbian voice, have not been explored. That is, if we cannot hypothesize a single original source, with a single originating theme, what is it that unifies the text? Is it simply a series of unconnected thoughts, random jottings not intended to be read as a whole? If so, is it still legitimate to see the female voice of the speaker and that of the addressee as intimately connected to one another? What was the compositional strategy behind the creation of CIL 4. 5296?

There is one more piece to be added to the puzzle of the poem. Although most scholars reproduce the poem as I have done, divided according to the apparent metrical lines, it is important to remember that it was not originally written on the wall to follow the metrical schema (a common practice in ancient graffiti). A pure transcription of its original written form would appear:

O utinam liceat collo complexa tenere || braciola et teneris
 oscula ferre labelis || i nunc, ventis tua gaudia, pupula, crede. ||
 Crede mihi, levis est natura virorum. || Saepe ego cu[m] media
 vigilare[m] perdita nocte, || haec mecum medit[ur]is: multos
 Fortuna quos supstulit alte || hos modo proiectos subito
 praecipitesque premit. || Sic Venus ut subito coiunxit
 corpora amantum, || dividit lux et se

Two things are worth noting about this inscriptive form. First, the fact that the metrical lines run together suggests that the text was intended to be read together, not as a disparate catalogue of literary fragments. Elsewhere in Pompeii, we do find what appear to be lists of poetic tags, as in the basilica where two elegiac couplets from Ovid are found together with one from Propertius, a pair of lines perhaps from a lost comedy, and another elegiac couplet otherwise unknown. There, however, not only are the texts written out according to the metrical lines, they are spaced apart in order to indicate the difference between one passage and another. The famous group of ‘Tiburinus’ writings from the wall of the small theatre goes one step further and provides small hatch marks in the left margin beside the verses, to indicate

where one leaves off and another begins. Despite the possibly disparate origins of the verses which appear together as *CIL* 4. 5296, therefore, it would seem that their writer intended them to appear as a single text.

Secondly, however, there is one place in the text where not only do the metrical and written lines coincide, but the line end also marks the completion of a sentence and a thought. This is after *crede*, which concludes line 3 of the poem and line 2 of the text as it is written on the wall. This coincidence of metrical, semantic, and inscriptive endings creates a strong break in the poem, which is especially strongly felt because of the shift in tone which accompanies it. While the first three lines of the poem are heavy with diminutives—*brachiola*, *oscula*, *labellis*, and *pupula*—these disappear entirely after the end of line 3. If we agree with the assessment, moreover, that *labellis* has been substituted here for *labris* (as the meter would suggest), it seems that the diminutive may have been added to the lines to maintain this particular tone. In addition to the diminutives, the first three lines of the poem are unified by their explicit eroticism and their focus on the beloved girl, her little embracing arms, her tender little lips, and the (presumably sexual) *gaudia* referenced in line 3.³² Following the invitation to ‘entrust your joys to the winds’, however, the poem shifts its focus, from the beloved to the lover, and her imaginary lonely vigil at her beloved’s door. The movement from the imaginary intertwined bodies of the first three lines to the night-time isolation described in the lines which follow creates a stark contrast, between the affair as it might be and the situation as it is. The shift which occurs at the end of line 3, therefore, is dramatic, and particularly important for our purposes because it divides the two feminine linguistic signifiers in the poem from one another: the vocative *pupula* which occurs in line 3 and the participle *perdita* (agreeing with *ego*) in line 5.

In the past, scholars have wanted to attribute the change of tone after line 3 to a change of speaker in the poem, an argument which (to their minds) has the merit of also resolving the apparent lesbianism of the poem. In this reading, lines 1–3 are spoken by a man to a woman—or perhaps quoted from a man by a woman—while the following lines (4–9) represent her response. This is, in theory,

³² Adams (1982) 196–8. Cf. Antolin (1996) 205.

possible. Yet, as with the hypothesis that 5296 is simply a series of unconnected quotations, parallels in Pompeii do not support it: where there are changes of speaker in other texts, there is either a change of hand in the inscription—i.e. there was an actual change of writer—or a clear linguistic marker is provided: e.g. CIL 4. 8259, which concludes its first section with *scribit rivalis vale*, or 1679 which introduces its second passage with *[H]edone dicit*. If the reader is actually supposed to imagine a change of speaker between lines 3 and 4 of 4. 5296, however, there is nothing in the inscription to indicate it: although the hand deteriorates somewhat as the inscription continues, perhaps due to weariness of the act of inscribing, it is clearly the same one; there is no verbal marker of the supposed change unless we are willing to count the coincidence of metrical and inscriptive endings at the close of line 3, which would put a significant burden on the reader's attention to detail. Perhaps the point might be made that the change of speaker existed in the original poem which is being repeated—after all, were someone to quote (for instance) a random passage from Virgil, *Eclogue* 1 without the names of the speakers, it would be hard to tell that an amoebaeon exchange is represented. But, again, the metrical patterning of the text points to a composition made up of quotations taken from several different texts; line 4 (a hexameter) cannot follow immediately after the (hexameter) line 3, nor line 5 (another hexameter) after line 4, unless the elegiac couplet pattern established in lines 1–2 has been abandoned.

In other words, the metrical patterning, or lack thereof, suggests that the poem is an independent or popular composition, which in turn suggests that it would contain some linguistic indicator of a change of speaker. Instead, I would argue that we should see the break in the poem as further testimony to what the metrical patterns already indicate: that the first lines (the opening couplet and the next hexameter) were drawn from one source, but that those which come after it were taken from another text or texts. This would explain not only the haphazard meter and the shift in tone between the first three lines and the rest of the poem, but also the fact that the first three lines seem to have been written as a single piece which concludes at the first use of *crede*. The second section then picks up with the second *crede*, which forms a linguistic bridge by echoing what went before, and marks the shift of the poem from its first, erotic interest in the beloved to its second, more somber, focus on the lover herself. This shift is marked not coincidentally by the move from *tua gaudia* . . .

crede to *crede mihi*. Not only does the same imperative govern two different constructions—a semantic joke not dissimilar to ‘Tiburtinus’ tag *da veniam ut veniam* (CIL 4. 4971)—but it is used with the second-person possessive adjective (*tua*) on the one hand and the first-person pronoun (*mihi*) on the other. Indeed, following *mihi* here there are two further uses of the first-person singular pronoun, *ego* and *mecum*, emphasizing the private and lonely vigil of the lover. Thus, the first three-line section looks outwards towards the beloved girl, not only providing a fantasy description of pieces of her body, but also providing the feminine vocative (*pupula*) which identifies her as female. With the second use of *crede*, however, the speaker/poet turns inwards, focusing on herself and (in line 5) providing the information that she, too, is a woman. It would clearly be a mistake, therefore, to ignore the transition in the poem which occurs between the two uses of *crede*. But that transition, I would argue, serves more to highlight than to obscure the gender identifications of the poem’s two female protagonists.

We should not, however, forget or abandon the idea that there is some discontinuity in the poem as it appears on the wall—a discontinuity which indicates that the text was composed from quotations from several different originals. This hypothesis not only serves to explain the metrical anomalies of the poem, it also offers at least conceptual support for the idea that it expresses same-sex female desire. It can hardly be escaped that, if CIL 4. 5296 were to be accepted as a ‘lesbian’ love poem, it would be the only one of its kind to survive from the Latin-speaking world. Despite the best efforts of scholars, we have essentially no direct evidence of female homoerotic love in Rome: the best we can do is a collection of hostile literary and technical treatments ranging from Phaedrus to Juvenal to the medical writers and Church fathers, all of which condemn sex between women as low-class, immoral, barbarous, and disgusting. These texts may, moreover, be the product of Greek influence, male fantasy, or literary hyperbole. The closest we can come to ‘actual lesbians’ in the Roman period is a handful of magical papyri from Egypt which appear to offer expressions of women’s erotic desire for one another—but these are, on the one hand, so formulaic, and on the other, from a cultural context so distant from that which produced our other data, that it is difficult to know how to speak of them all in the same breath. This dearth of evidence should not, however, be taken as testimony that sexual activity between women simply did not

exist in the ancient Roman world. As Judith Hallett noted in her seminal article on the subject, the very passion with which Roman authors seek to deny even the physical possibility of female same-sex eroticism suggests a cultural reality is being covered up.³³ But it is also clear that a woman who sought to express her desire for another woman, especially if she wished to do it through the medium of poetry, would have been trying to find a voice within a profoundly homophobic cultural context.

This, in fact, is one of the reasons why many scholars have had difficulty seeing *CIL* 4. 5296 as an expression of lesbian desire: they judge the text on the basis of what they know about the Roman world, its prejudices, and the likelihood that the voice of non-normative desire could have found a place in its literary tradition. As I have noted, however, the relationship between 5296 and that tradition is by no means a simple one. But if we are able to see the graffito as a hotchpotch of quotations—pieces of text taken from elsewhere and combined to create the poem as we have it—we can continue to see it as an expression of lesbian desire without assuming a canonical (or even peri-canonical) original. In other words, while it is rather unlikely that a lesbian erotic text was circulating in the streets of Pompeii as a part of popular poetic discourse, the idea of two separate poems—one containing an address to a female beloved, and another in the voice of a female lover—seems quite plausible; in this case, we need only hypothesize that the writer of 5296 made the choice to combine the two into a single text to create her homoerotic poem. This is not, of course, the kind of compositional technique which we are accustomed to attribute to ancient authors, although it is not perhaps entirely removed from the dense network of allusions to, and intertexts with, earlier works from which some scholars see canonical poetry as emerging.³⁴ But the point is that whoever wrote *CIL* 4. 5296 existed at some remove from those authors, in a world where poetry was frequently repeated, rewritten, and recombined to create different compositions.³⁵

If, then, we hypothesize an ‘author’ of this kind—one who did not necessarily compose the individual lines which make up *CIL* 4. 5296, but who is responsible for their selection and presentation on the wall—we are still left with the question of what connects these

³³ Hallett (1989), 209–27.

³⁴ On which, see Hinds (1998).

³⁵ See Ch. 3 for a discussion of graffito authorship.

particular fragments, what unifying poetic theme or narrative (if any) runs through the text as we have it. For instance, it is worth noting the way in which the language of the first lines actually enacts the embraces it describes. This is evident especially in *teneris oscula ferre labelis*, as the kisses are surrounded by little lips, but also in the ‘intertwined’ word order of *collo complexa tenere braciola*. In fact, the rather peculiar use of the ablative *collo* here, rather than the accusative which is required if the word is to be governed by *complexa*, offers an appropriately convoluted image: rather than simply encircling the lover, the beloved’s arms are actually held by the neck they embrace. Moreover, scholars have long noted the preponderance of diminutives in the first lines of the poem: *brachiola*, *oscula*, *labellis*, and *pupula*. This has added ammunition to the arsenal of those who want the speaker to be male, since, they argue, one would only describe a woman as having little arms and tender little lips.³⁶ On the other hand, there is a tradition in antiquity that women often spoke in *blanditiae*, babytalk or endearments, which has caused some scholars to ‘hear’ a female voice in the little kisses et al. of the poem’s first three lines.³⁷ It is worth noting that the diminutives are confined to those first lines, as the poem makes a shift towards the sober in line 4ff., which seems to argue that they are on some level deliberate rather than simply a natural aspect of the speaker’s language. If so, I wonder whether we might not see them as playing on the ways in which such mincing little talk can be both prospective and respective, namely, can reflect both on the thing described and on the describer. We are left then with both a feminized speaker and a feminized beloved, which is apropos: in other words, the discourse of the opening lines serves to introduce the homoerotic nature of the poem.

³⁶ Catullus is, of course, famous for his use of diminutives, and the Augustan poets equally famous for their lack of them—a trend which may be due to the ‘seriousness’ of the latter in relation to the ‘frivolousness’ of the former, or perhaps to their association with colloquial speech. See Gow (1932) 150–7. Diminutives, however, return to canonical poetry in the work of Martial, who cannot have had a direct influence on the texts in Pompeii but whose diction may well reflect poetic usage of the time.

³⁷ M. E. Gilleland summarizes the evidence for a specifically female mode of expression in Gilleland (1980), 180–3. Much of the evidence is from texts later than our graffito, e.g. Donatus’ commentary on Terence and Jerome’s *epistulae*, but we may note Seneca *Controv.* 1 praef. 8, *ad muliebres blanditias extenuare vocem*. D. O. Ross notes of the diminutives in Catullus, ‘they have an obvious place in the work of a poet who prides himself on being *delicatus* and are often used to convey the idea of effeminacy’: (1969b) 24.

Moreover, as I have already noted, one of the motives which structures the poem is the movement from a focus on the beloved in lines 1–3 to a focus on the lover in lines 4–6—a movement which corresponds to the poem’s shift from the hypothetical and desired union (introduced by the opening *O utinam liceat* in line 1) to the ‘real’ lonely vigil of line 5. The pivot point, if we may call it that, between these two ideas are perhaps CIL 4. 5296’s most puzzling lines, namely *i nunc, ventis tua gaudia, pupula, crede. || Crede mihi, levis est natura virorum*. Exactly what these sentiments signify has long baffled scholars. The closest parallels to the first line seem to be proverbial expressions about the instability of hopes or promises, as when Turnus in *Aeneid* 10 ‘does not recognize that the winds bear away his rejoicing’ (*nec ferre videt sua gaudia ventos*: 10. 652). In the context of love affairs and love poetry, however, the figure often appears to emphasize the faithlessness of the (female) beloved: thus, Propertius says of women, ‘whatever they swear the wind and the wave snatch away’ (*quidquid iurarunt ventus et unda rapit*: 2. 28. 8), and Catullus offers the opinion that ‘what a woman says to an eager lover ought to be written on the wind and moving water’ (*mulier cupido quod dicit amanti in vento et rapida scribere oportet aqua*: 70. 3–4). The graffito’s invitation to ‘entrust your joys to the winds’ thus has a ring of sarcasm, causing some critics to see it as the speaker’s bitter quotation of her lover’s dismissal.³⁸ Yet it is important to connect the thought of this line to the one which follows, a connection which is emphasized by the double use of *crede*. Here, too, *levis est natura virorum* has a proverbial quality, although it also seems to be something of a joke: the fundamental instability or *levitas* of women’s minds and spirits was a well-worn trope, a criticism which here is reversed and redirected at men.³⁹ In fact, it does not seem too much of a stretch to hear the final word of the phrase as a punchline of sorts, since we would naturally expect *feminarum* instead of *virorum*, so that the two lines would signify, ‘go ahead: throw your favours to the winds. After all, instability is a natural quality of women.’

³⁸ e.g. Della Corte (1958) 70–1.

³⁹ Instability or flightiness is often cited as the reasoning behind the restrictions put on women’s control over their own persons and property: *veteres enim voluerunt feminas, etiamsi perfectae aetatis sint, propter animi levitatem in tutela esse* (Gaius, *Inst.* 1. 144). Cf. Cicero, *pro Murena* 27; Seneca the Elder, *Contr.* 1. 6. 5; Seneca the Younger, *ad Marc.* 1. 1; Valerius Maximus 9. 1. 3. The legal arguments have been analysed in Dixon (2001) 73–88.

It is, however, men who are criticized here, men who are labelled *levis* by nature. In this light, then, the sarcastic invitation of the earlier line takes on a different sense, as the instability of the wind becomes a metaphor for the instability of the male nature. The act of entrusting pleasure to the winds is then not a suggestion that the beloved girl is herself unreliable, but that she may be naive enough not to know that men generally are. Moreover, it is worth noting that in the original inscribed form of the poem, the almost-hexameter *crede mihi levis est natura virorum* is joined to the first two and a half feet of the following line, *saepe ego cu<m> media*. This serves to underscore the fact that there is actually a contrast being drawn here, between the inconstant nature of men and the constant (*saepe*) vigil of the poet. The masculine nature is unreliable, but the speaker's love, as it is manifested in her night-time vigil, is sure and solid—a distinction which both supports and is supported by the implicit distinction being drawn between the male and female natures. Indeed, that distinction is also highlighted by the word at the end of the fourth inscribed line. Again, metrically this word (*multos*) should occur in the middle of the sixth hexameter, but as I noted of *crede*, I think it is not accidentally placed here. In terms of sense, of course, this simply marks the beginning of the thoughts which beset the speaker as she keeps watch in the night. Given the gendered terms in which this pair of lines began, however, we should not overlook the word's masculine plural ending: it is men who have just been labelled inconstant, and (we will discover in the next lines) it is men who are subject to the whims of fortune. Critics who have analysed CIL 4. 5296 in the past have always taken the masculine plural here as simply generalizing, which on some level it is; taken on its own, the line might merely be gnomic and a bit banal. But, again, we cannot ignore the fact that the poem itself has already introduced the question of gender in the most blatant manner possible, so that *multos* (which will be reinforced by *quos*, *hos*, and *proiectos* in the following line) can be seen to insist on the point made earlier: men, in contrast with women, have by nature less stable lives.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ The fact that this is an ironic restatement of a cultural norm may be seen in (e.g.) the epitaph of Murdia, in which the speaker asserts 'it is difficult to find new kinds of praise for a woman, since their lives are disturbed by little variation' (*adquirere novas laudes mulieri sit arduum, quom minoribus varietatibus vita iactetur*: CIL 6. 10230). A similar idea is expressed in the so-called *Laudatio Turiae* (1. 30–6). See Milnor (2005) 215–16.

If, then, we understand gender to be one of the issues around which the poem is framed, it is worth noting that the figures presiding over the rise and fall of male fortunes and affections are both goddesses, Fortuna and Venus. Their manipulating presences stand behind and contrast with the vicissitudes that they produce in the lives of mortal men. The poem thus leaves us with the image of male lovers who come and go, tossed on the whims of luck and desire, creating a marked contrast with the inextricable female limbs and lips with which the poem begins. This underscores the point made in the lines *i nunc, ventis tua gaudia, pupula, crede*. || *Crede mihi, levis est natura virorum*, which now we might gloss, ‘go ahead and entrust your happiness to the winds, little girl; believe me, you won’t find a reliable man’. The better qualifications of the speaker to be the girl’s lover are embedded in the imaginary embraces with which she opens the poem, and the constant vigil which she describes herself as keeping in the night. The fact that she thus measures herself against the (hypothetical) unreliability of men is, I would argue, as much ‘proof’ of her gender as *ego . . . perdita*. But an additional proof, and perhaps a more interesting one, is the ways in which throughout the poem she marshals and redeploys negative stereotypes about women to frame her suit: from the lisping diminutives in the opening lines which may mockingly imitate *muliebres blanditiae*, to the winds which will carry away not a woman’s faithless promises but her hopes for an enduring love affair, to the ‘natural’ instability which, it turns out, marks the lives of men rather than women. We may see in Sulpicia the ways in which a female poet may (indeed, must) have a different relationship to poetry and poetic discourse from her male counterparts.⁴¹ The anonymous author of *CIL* 4. 5296 seems less concerned with the particular tropes of elegy, but I think we can see in her a similar interest in engaging with and subverting the cultural prejudices which would restrict a woman’s right to speak.

It is, of course, by no means impossible to imagine that such things might have been said by a woman addressing a man, or by a man addressing a woman, or by someone pretending to be both a man and a woman addressing each other. My point is simply that by seriously engaging with the possibility that *CIL* 4. 5296 represents an erotic communication between women, we can actually understand the

⁴¹ Milnor (2002).

logic of the poem in different terms, and hear in it a voice not elsewhere represented in Latin poetry. Of course, it is certainly true that we have no way of gaining access to the biological reality of the person who inscribed the poem on the wall; even if we accept the content of the poem as homoerotic, that is, we have no way of proving that its author was not a man imagining himself as a woman who loved a woman. Such concerns about the historical ‘authenticity’ of authorship—especially in the case of authors who do not conform to our expectations—are traditional in classics. And because love poetry of the late Republic and early Empire spent a great deal of time playing with the social role of the author, the poet-as-lover is a particularly suspect position from which someone might speak. At the same time, however, it is worth noting that, as often as male poets may adopt a female persona in which to speak, they rarely do so in order to articulate female homoerotic desire, and when they do, they tend to represent women who love women as freakishly masculine.⁴² Thus, for instance, Martial famously devotes two epigrams to Philaenis, a woman who exercises, eats, and has sex like a man: in addition, ‘she doesn’t perform fellatio—she thinks it not manly enough—but rather she eats up “the middle bits” of girls’ (*non fellat—putat hoc parum virile—*, | *sed plane medias vorat puellas*: 7. 67. 16–17). The ironic approach which CIL 4. 5296 takes to gendered language and stereotypes, therefore, is at the very least a radical departure from the ways in which ‘lesbian identity’ was generally depicted in ancient literary texts.

LOVE, SEX, MATERIALITY

Of course, one of the significant differences between a poem transmitted as part of the ancient literary canon and a graffito is that the latter is simultaneously artefact and text: it has a materiality which the former lacks. Unlike, for instance, a poem by Sulpicia, we are able to ‘locate’ the ultimate written manifestation of the graffito in both space and, to a certain extent, time. Of course, one of the great unanswered, and unanswerable, questions about the graffiti is what relationship

⁴² See Hallett (1989); Brooten (1996) 42–50; P. Gordon (1997), 274–91; Pintabone (2002), 256–85.

they had to the world of oral communication, the poetic life of the streets of which we certainly have traces in the material and textual record but very little direct evidence. Certain stock phrases—such as *quisquis amat valeat* or *venimus huc cupidi*—which show up in multiple graffiti, in various permutations, would seem likely to have been the building blocks of popular songs, and the opening tag of Virgil's *Aeneid* seems to have circulated more freely than the written text itself. CIL 4. 5296 contains certain linguistic indicators—the loss of the final 'm' from *cum* and *vigilarem* most notably—which suggest some relationship with Latin as it was spoken, but, on the other hand as I have noted, the use of interpuncts is an affectation drawn strictly from the world of writing. In addition, even a cursory examination shows that the graffito is surprisingly neat, carefully inserted into the corner of the painted wall decoration where the lines turned to run parallel to the ceiling; there is an even space between the first letters of the lines and the decorative boarder which originally framed the white panel into which it was written. The text may well have been composed orally elsewhere, but there was real care and interest given to the production of CIL 4. 5296's written form.

On one level, this care and interest should not, I would argue, surprise us. After all, although it has misleadingly entered the scholarly record that the graffito was found 'in a doorway'—something which often leads critics to assert that it was originally located in 'public' space—it was actually discovered within a small, two-room house in Pompeii's Regio 9, on the corner of the wall where the fauces opens into the interior courtyard. Moreover, there is evidence of two different types of lock for the door to the street, a cross-beam and wooden struts which would have been propped against the outside door to hold it closed.⁴³ CIL 4. 5296 was indeed found 'in a doorway', but that doorway was well beyond the threshold which marked the boundary between the house and the street. Thus, the poem was written neatly and carefully, on a wall which already sported some simple but elegant red-and-black painting, in a place where not only could both text and writer be seen but where they could hardly have escaped the notice of anyone inside the three-room dwelling. Of course, it is worth noting that—perhaps contrary to expectation—it is not unusual to find Pompeian graffiti, even fairly extensive

⁴³ For a discussion of ancient Roman door bars and locks, see Marquardt (1990) 228–36.

compositions, in what we would call in the modern world ‘private’ space. Many texts were found inside houses, often in peristyles, but also atria, triclinia, *cubicula*, and other interior spaces whose use is difficult to identify.⁴⁴ Moreover, those texts—when they appear on walls which feature pre-existing painted decoration—often make the effort to respect the paintings, writing around rather than on top of the details they would otherwise obscure. Rather than seeing all graffiti as defacement, which is common among modern critics, I would argue that it is important to recognize the attempt which texts like CIL 4. 5296 make to work with, rather than against, the existing ornamentation of the space they occupy.⁴⁵

In the case of 5296, this is particularly significant because it coexists in the same space with other graffiti which seem to manifest different values. As I have noted, the final line inscribed below the poem is clearly by a different hand, which is shown not just by the different letter formations, but by the fact that the line of its first letter (‘P’) begins a long scratch which runs across the painted lines and intersects with another graffito written over the decorative boarder.⁴⁶ I have suggested that this is a partial quotation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 4. 73, and thus should be read as *paries quid ama(ntibus obstas)*, although the formation especially of the letters in the final word is quite poor. If, however, we see CIL 4. 5296 as a pastiche of quotations from other sources—some elegiac, some hexametric—the use of a quotation from the *Metamorphoses* to ‘cap’ the previous text makes

⁴⁴ A bare catalogue of the thousands of graffiti texts which divided them by find spot room-type would be interesting but runs the risk of eliding differences between kinds of text—a seven-line poem is clearly different from a small set of illegible scratches, for instance—and of effacing the fluidity of ancient Roman domestic space usage (e.g. it’s not clear that all small spaces which might have held beds were, in fact, *cubicula*, or that, if they were, they were regularly used for sleeping). More useful is the observation that almost every large house excavated in Pompeii contained at least some graffiti, and some houses contained a lot: an entire volume on the texts from the Insula of the Menander (1. 10) is to be published by Oxford University Press (Mouritsen, Varone, Ling, and Ling (forthcoming)). For specific cases of groups of graffiti, including some poetic fragments, found from inside spaces, see Solin on M. Fabius Rufus, and Giordano on Julius Polybius. Also worth noting are individual long poetic fragments, such as CIL 4. 1410 (from a *cubiculum* in 6. 7. 6); 4. 8408a–c (from the peristyle of 1. 10. 11); 4. 6842 (from the atrium of the house at 6. 16. 15); 4. 4509 (from the peristyle of the house at 6. 14. 20); 4. 2066 (from the fauces of 8. 4. 4).

⁴⁵ Indeed, M. Langner has observed the same thing about pictorial graffiti: (2001) 140.

⁴⁶ See Figure 4.3 for a photograph.

both thematic and generic sense. Indeed, Ovid goes on to have his separated lovers remark *quantum erat, ut sineres toto nos corpore iungi* ('How great it would be, were you to allow us to join with our whole bodies': *Met.* 4. 74), echoing the vocabulary and sentiments of the final lines of 5296. Thus, the added line seems to be responding to the eroticism and style of the poem above it. The other inscriptions lower down on the wall, moreover, may also be amorous in nature—but the participants in the drama are clearly different. The graffito in large letters to CIL 4. 5296's lower right reads simply *CROCINI VA(le) | ISMARE VA(le)*, or 'hello, Crocinus | hello, Ismarus!'; the inscription to the lower left, however, connects these two characters with *ISMARUS CROCINEN SUAE SAL(ve)*, or 'Ismarus says hello to his Crocinia (or Crocinena?)'. Thus, the latter inscription especially would seem to be the trace of some other relationship, not (like CIL 4. 5296) between women but involving at least one man. Yet none of these inscriptions show the kind of neatness or care which the writer of CIL 4. 5296 gave to her poem, nor do they show the same kind of concern to preserve the integrity of the wall decoration already in place. This difference is also matched by the difference in genre, if you will, between the two, between the cheerful, informal salutations and the more elaborate, brooding poetic text.



Figure 4.3. Detail of plaster fragment preserving CIL 4. 5296–8. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. Photograph by author.

My point is that there is a level of deliberation displayed in the inscription of the poem which is not matched in the other writings, which in turn gives us a sense of what we might call the different graffiti practices which they represent: the one an attempt to work with the decorative intent already expressed in the space, and other an attempt to work against it. This is not to say that the poem was always meant to be written on the hallway wall, or even that it was written there with the owner's approval. It is, however, to point out that whoever wrote this inscription displays a different sense of what the space means, and what the poem would mean within it: on some level, it does attempt to respect House 6's hallway as a space of display, and to insert the text (literally) into that framework. This divergent attitude towards the space and its decorative scheme is also expressed in the genres of the two sets of graffiti. On a certain level, it is true that the greetings represented in the Ismarus texts make sense here, in an entrance hallway, where people might well meet and say hello. Yet the inscription of those greetings does not necessarily contribute to making the space more than utilitarian; CIL 4. 5296, on the other hand, both visually and verbally gives more complexity to the space, as it becomes the (imagined) site of the love affair it purports to record. Indeed, it is worth noting that the different kinds of relationships which the texts represent are enacted visually for and upon the viewer, as the Ismarus greetings are large and easily read from a fair distance; the small size and intricacy of the erotic poem's inscription, on the other hand, require the reader to spend far longer and come much closer to the text in order to interpret it. The technique of reading which the text forces on the reader thus becomes part of the intimacy it celebrates.

In this context, it is worth taking note of one last piece of writing which also appears on the same hallway wall of House 6, in between the two Ismarus inscriptions already noted (CIL 4. 5299). Although it is written in small but readable letters, it is difficult to tell what relation it has to the other texts; the letter formation looks similar to that of the erotic poem, but there is not enough written to be sure. It reads, *deuronun*⁴⁷—that is, a transliteration into Latin letters of the Greek *δεῦρο νῦν* or 'hither, now!' This enigmatic inscription makes a

⁴⁷ CIL 4. 5299. Mau in CIL reads the second word as *num*, but an examination of the original text shows that the final line of the 'm' is actually later damage to the plaster.

remarkably good counterpoint for what I have been arguing for CIL 4. 5296, as it represents a demand for attention not just for the text and the speaker of the text, but for the place and time of speaking.⁴⁸ It insists, in the same way as but more directly than most graffiti, on the local experience of both the writing and the reading of the text. Yet the transliterated Greek is a curiosity. Greek itself is fairly common in Pompeian graffiti, although by no means as common as Latin; on the other hand, we have only a smattering of other instances of transliteration, although they include some fairly elaborate examples.⁴⁹ As with all questions about literacy in the ancient world, there is no scholarly consensus about how many people read Greek in Pompeii, and how much they read; the practice of transliteration may attest to a greater community of speakers than readers, a principle which was clearly true of ancient languages generally. *Deuronun*, though, would seem to have little particular significance as a Greek phrase, and we may wonder exactly why one would prefer it to the (perfectly serviceable) Latin *hinc nunc*. In response to this, I would suggest that we must see the gesture of the inscription to be similar to that of CIL 4. 5296, in the sense that they both wish to communicate a sense of immediacy and directness, but also to establish that they emerge from a larger world of education and cultural complexity. *Deuronun* offers the cache of its Greek origins in the same way that CIL 4. 5296 trades on the tropes of canonical poetry. At the same time, however, both texts also seek to change the terms of their linguistic or literary 'genre', as the one makes Greek letters into Latin and the other uses the tropes of heteroerotic culture to express homoerotic desire.

⁴⁸ It is also possible that, like the poetic texts in Latin above it, it is a quotation: in Euripides' *Hippolytos* 496, the two words appear together in one of the Nurse's speeches to Phaedra (which concerns, interestingly, the experience of unhappy love). Since, however, the two words there are used in two different phrases—on either side of a semicolon—it seems somewhat unlikely that they would be transliterated and written as a single word (as here). Perhaps instead we should see a reference to Sappho fr. 2, which opens *δεῦρον μ[* in an invocation of the goddess. Regardless of the text's source, its role as a 'literary' representation of a bid for attention is clear.

⁴⁹ I omit examples of transliteration in names, which is a practice so common as not to have been particularly meaningful. But longer examples from Pompeii include both single words (*epoese* in CIL 4. 4966) to the curious mixture found in the amphitheatre, *omnia munera vicisti; ton henta theamatōn esti* ('you have conquered every show; you are one of the seven wonders': CIL 4. 1111). The first three words are Latin, the last four, transliterated Greek (*henta* is mistakenly written for *hepta*).

From context, then, we come back to text—or rather, to the intersection between them which is where graffiti exist. Classics generally, as a discipline, has long been interested in the distinction between two ways of understanding a written document, as something which is framed by a set of transhistorical formal concerns, and as an object which is both situated in, and gives us as scholars access to, a very distant moment in time. Over the past few decades, the field has moved away from its traditional focus on the first to be more concerned with the second, a circumstance which has done much to transform our views of both classical literature and history.⁵⁰ Yet one of the effects of Pompeian graffiti like *CIL* 4. 5296 is to force us to confront not just how literary forms are framed by historical practices, but that literary forms sometimes *are* historical practices, on a real material level. I invoke the rhetoric of reality here with some hesitation, since the study of ancient graffiti has long been dogged by scholars' desire for them to represent unmediated access to the truth of ancient culture. Ironically, that desire for truth has led over the years to some fairly outlandish critical fictions. At the same time, then, that I would like some of the 'real' facts which have been lost from the scholarly record to be restored to our reading of *CIL* 4. 5296, I would also argue that the study of texts like the Pompeian graffiti will inevitably be disruptive, since they require us to recognize not only what we do not know but what certain disciplinary structures have not allowed us to know. It is through such studies, then, that we may gain a better sense of what literature and its practice meant in Roman Pompeii, but also what kinds of new and different assumptions we should make about gender, sexuality, and cultural production in the ancient world.

APPENDIX 4.1: ON THE LOCATION OF *CIL* 4. 5296

CIL 4. 5296 may well be a uniquely problematic text, since it exists in almost every way, both literally and figuratively, on the margins of our knowledge about the ancient world. Thus, for instance, although the nineteenth-century excavators would subsequently finish digging the tiny house in whose entrance-way the graffito was discovered, they did not pursue their investigations of

⁵⁰ On which, see Farrell (2005) 91–102; cf. Barchiesi (2005) 135–62.

this section of Pompeii much further: by 1891, they had shifted their attentions elsewhere in the city, having uncovered just one more small dwelling to the south of CIL 4. 5296. A visit to the site today is done in the shadow of a high wall of unexcavated earth, rising perhaps 20 feet above street level, which covers almost all of Regio 9 south and east of the graffito's alleyway.⁵¹ It may be that the excavators were disappointed at the scale of the dwellings and the richness of the material finds which were coming to light in this area: although the previous block had yielded the spectacular House of the Centenary—with its marble statuary, bright frescoes, and impressively scaled fountain room—Insula 9 provided nothing so grand. In particular, the houses whose doorways did not open onto the main street, but onto the narrow passage running south between blocks 8 and 9, were on a dramatically smaller scale, their doorways facing the blank east wall of the House of the Centenary. The excavators' choice, therefore, to continue digging east and north along the main Via di Nola rather than south on CIL 4. 5296's unnamed *vicolo*, was a natural one, given the interest of archaeology at the time in the art and architecture of the city's wealthy elite. Regardless of the reasoning, however, that decision means that the kinds of statements which we can make about the graffito's own alleyway in particular, and its region of Pompeii in general, are necessarily limited. CIL 4. 5296 was literally situated on the boundary between what we do and do not know about the ancient city.

Turning our attention to the particular house within which the graffito was found,⁵² we are again left with more questions than answers—less, perhaps, because of a fundamental lack of evidence, but because the study of Roman domestic architecture in a systematic fashion is still a relatively recent phenomenon. The work which has been done has concentrated almost exclusively on dwellings inhabited by the city's wealthy elite, on mapping the complex networks of public and private spaces which make up Pompeii's great atrium houses.⁵³ The methodological tools which have been developed in such studies are certainly important, but nevertheless of limited use in analysing a house consisting only of two tiny rooms, a balcony, and a small open court. Despite its size, however, it would be a mistake to call it, as early excavators did, a 'poor' dwelling:⁵⁴ its entry hall sports a simple but attractive marble-chip mosaic; the length of its north wall was, at one time, decorated with painted plaster; among the objects unearthed within the house during the nineteenth-century excavations was a small decorative

⁵¹ See Figure 4.4 for a photograph of the street.

⁵² See Figure 4.5 for a plan of the house and its surroundings.

⁵³ Thus, for instance, J. Clarke (1991) and Wallace-Hadrill (1994a). Some noteworthy exceptions are Packer (1975) 133–42; McKay (1975), 80–99; Hoffmann (1979) 97–118 and (1980) 1–14; and Nappo, (1997) 91–120.

⁵⁴ 'Abitazione piccola e povera': Mau (1890) 228–84, at 252.



Figure 4.4. Facade of ‘House 6’ (Pompeii 9. 9. 6), located in the middle under the projecting balcony. Note the wall of unexcavated earth which covers the alleyway beyond ‘House 7’. Photograph by author.

statue in bronze of Zeus brandishing a thunderbolt.⁵⁵ Moreover, the house, known as ‘House 6’ to the original excavators, contained a tiny but workable hearth, a cistern for storing water, a small built-in cabinet, and a number of cooking pots, found in the atrium—the poorest dwellings of the ancient city generally did not have specific areas devoted to food preparation, their inhabitants being dependent on small portable braziers or ‘lunch counters’ for hot food. Rather than the home of someone genuinely ‘poor’, therefore, we might call the location of *CIL* 4. 5296 a house somewhere between working and middle class.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ A. Sogliano, in *Notizie degli scavi* (1891), 254–64; Mau (1890) 253–4.

⁵⁶ See Nappo (1997) for a discussion of ‘row houses’, of which House 6 may be an example, although it does not neatly conform to any of the house-types he discusses. Nevertheless, it is certainly worth noting his suggestion that the development of such small dwellings was the result of the influx of population which took place with the

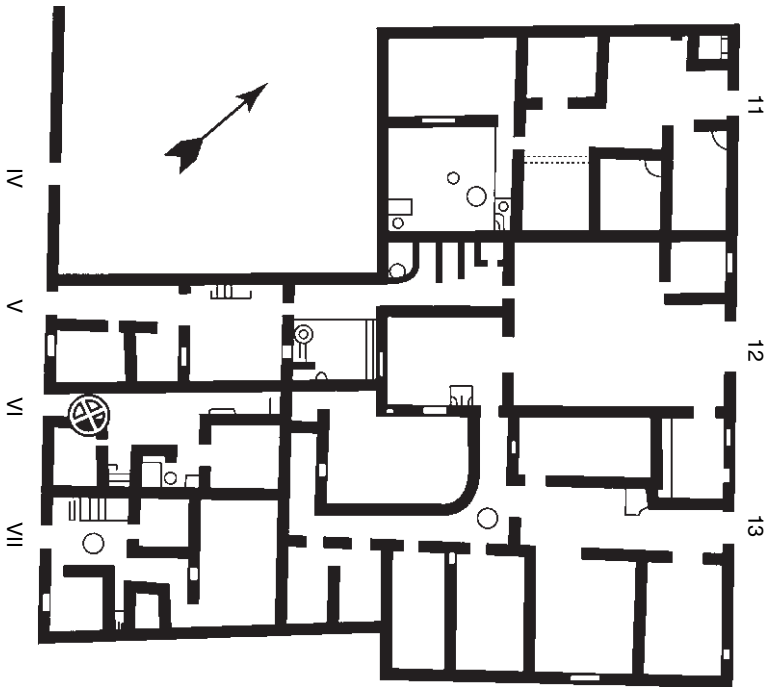


Figure 4.5. Plan of Pompeii 9. 9. 5–7, showing findspot of *CIL* 4. 5296–9. After A. Sogliano, *Notizie degli scavi* (1891), 254. Redrawn by Sam Woolley.

A comparison of House 6 with those next door to it is instructive. To the south is another small, self-contained dwelling which has been identified as that of Aemilius Celer on the basis of a graffito on the outside wall which announces *hic habitat Aemilius Celer*.⁵⁷ This Celer is generally assumed to be the same one hired to paint a notice announcing a gladiatorial combat financed by Decimus Lucretius Satrius Valens, priest of Nero, and his son: the announcement ends *scripsit Aemilius Celer singulus ad lunam* ('Aemilius Celer wrote this, alone, by the light of the moon').⁵⁸ Two other programmata,

end of the Second Punic War, at the end of the 3rd century BCE. He is inclined to see these as the houses of 'smallholders living at subsistence level' (120), in contrast with the earlier assessment of Hoffmann (1979), who sees them as belonging to the middle class rather than the poorest inhabitants of the city (111).

⁵⁷ See Della Corte (1965), 166–7.

⁵⁸ The full text runs (*CIL* 4. 3884): *D. Lucreti Satri Valentis flaminis Neronis Caesaris Aug(usti) fili perpetui gladiatorum paria XX, et D. Lucreti Valentis fili glad(iatorum) paria X pug(nabunt) Pompeis VI V IV III pr(idie) Idus Apr(iles). Venatio*

election notices, also end with the proclamation *scripsit Aemilius Celer*.⁵⁹ If he was indeed a sign painter by trade, Celer would seem to have enjoyed his work, since his name appears repeatedly scratched into the walls of House 7, perhaps supporting the idea that at the very least he lived somewhere in the neighbourhood. The 'House of Aemilius Celer', like its neighbour to the north, consists of rooms organized around a central courtyard, a cooking alcove, and a stairway to a balcony overlooking the street. The only significant architectural differences between it and House 6 appear to be that the southern house contains two rooms identified as *cubicula* rather than one, and that its front door opens directly onto the atrium rather than an entrance hall. Again, like House 6, House 7 has a decorative pavement in the entryway, a space for cooking, and, in addition, sports some fancy painted faux marble which caused Sogliano to remark rather dryly that one can tell this was the house of a decorator.⁶⁰ If we accept that it was Celer who lived here, we may postulate at least one inhabitant who was both literate and employed in a semi-skilled trade;⁶¹ at the very least, the decorative scheme argues for an owner not unaware of contemporary fashions in wall covering,⁶² with the enthusiasm and means to effect them in his own house.

The space immediately to the north of House 6 is less easily categorized. Its doorway, like that of its neighbour, opens onto a hallway running east to an open court, past openings into two small rooms, identified by excavators as a dining room and a bedroom. Unlike Houses 6 and 7, however, its court contains no cistern or evidence of a hearth—but access to such conveniences is provided by a door through the back wall of the atrium into a large utility area, including a roughly formed *impluvium*, a place for a cooking fire, and a latrine. This area is joined to the east to a complexly interconnected network of rooms and courtyards whose lack of systematic plan and numerous unidentifiable rooms led early excavators to call it a 'hotel'.⁶³ Such a label is not, perhaps, as naive as it at first seems, though we should see its function more akin to that of New York City's 'single-room occupancy' shelters than of the standard Holiday Inn. This is to say that we may certainly imagine a number of different, unrelated people making this space their home, but that arrangement does not need to have been temporary or restricted to travellers.

legitima et vela erunt. Scr(ipsit) Aemilius Celer sing(ulus) ad luna(m). See Mau and Kelsey (1899) 222.

⁵⁹ CIL 4. 3775 and 3820.

⁶⁰ 'È una modestissima abitazione, la cui entrata pretende ad una certa decorazione, quasi ad avventire che questa è la casa di un decoratore.' Sogliano, in *Notizie degli scavi* (1891) 264.

⁶¹ On which, see Della Corte (1965) 167–8.

⁶² A similar effect may be found, for instance, in the fountain room of the House of the Centenary.

⁶³ Sogliano, in *Notizie degli scavi* (1891) 260–1.

The cities of ancient Italy contained numerous buildings organized on just such a plan, for the housing of their poorer citizens: better known, perhaps, are Rome and Ostia's five- and six-storey *insulae*, notoriously prone to deadly fires and collapse. Pompeii's inhabitants seem to have been more inclined to build across rather than up, but the principle is the same—one- or two-room apartments, containing no formal provisions for cooking or waste disposal, rented out to individuals or families as living spaces and/or workshops.⁶⁴ Those who dwelt in Insula 9's 'hotel' would seem to have been better off than most, since the central utility area would have provided them a relatively convenient source of water and place for food preparation within their own walls. Looking back, therefore, to the small apartment north of House 6, we may see it as a slightly more upscale version of the living spaces in the rabbit warren of spaces which lie to the east—semi-secluded, two rooms rather than one, with its own courtyard and entrance onto the western *vicolo*, but still dependent on the shared central facilities for the necessities of domestic life.

In sum, therefore, the status of House 6 would seem to be somewhere between that of its two neighbours: not as large or floridly decorated as House 7, but self-sufficient as to its facilities in ways that the apartment to its north is not. This is not to say that we should imagine sharp differences in class between the inhabitants of the row of dwellings which *open* onto Insula 9's western *vicolo*. In comparison, as I have remarked, with the House of the Centenary in the previous block, or even the House of the Doctor which occupies the northern section of Insula 9, the houses whose entrances line the alleyways are all what might be called 'middle-class' habitations—small, fairly simple, and sheltering those whose livelihood was to a greater or lesser extent derived from paid employment.⁶⁵ Indeed, in this context it is worth noting that the hallway on whose wall CIL 4. 5296 was found contained a surprisingly large number of coins, more than, for instance, were yielded by the larger and apparently wealthier House of the Doctor to the north of Insula 9. These included 5 denarii, 4 unidentified silver coins, 4 sestertii, and 4 dupondii. Although 4 of the denarii dated, rather curiously, from the age of the Triumvirs, the dupondii were of Galba, Vespasian, and Titus⁶⁶, so that it seems that the space was in active use up until the disaster in 79 CE. This entrance hallway also yielded a silver ring, a bronze lamp, and two bronze fibulae. The space at the centre of the house, moreover, contained a number of tools for cooking, including a bronze frying pan, two cauldrons, an iron

⁶⁴ McKay (1975).

⁶⁵ For an overview of class and neighbourhood in Pompeii, see Wallace-Hadrill (1994b), 39–62.

⁶⁶ The last is actually identified in the excavation report as a dupondius of Domitian, which is likely to have been the result of confusion on the part of excavators between the portrait types and legends of the two emperor-brothers.

hook, and a balance for weighing—associated with this last, one assumes, should be the lead weight of 4.1 kg found in the same area. In addition, a number of iron instruments were found which were identified by excavators as agricultural tools: a hatchet, a pruning hook, and four hoes.⁶⁷ Excavators also picked up, somewhat improbably, the horn of a goat. Finally, they also found an astonishingly large number, for a house so small, of terracotta lamps (twelve in all), including some which were fairly elaborate: one decorated with a female figure holding a cornucopia, two with Jupiter and an eagle (one of which grasps a thunderbolt), and one with a running deer.⁶⁸

This assemblage of goods seems to indicate a surprising level of activity for such a small space, but it is also worth remembering that, as in many places in Pompeii, here we miss the evidence of the floors above the first. In the eruption, the higher storeys of most structures of Pompeii fell to the ground under the weight of the volcanic material, so that objects which were originally located in rooms above come to be found jumbled together at the lowest level. We are fortunate in the case of House 6, actually to have part of the second storey preserved, namely the room located above the front room and fauces (entrance hall) inside the house, and extending to the balcony over the street. Indeed, it was in this room that the bronze statue of Zeus mentioned earlier was found, along with three unidentifiable coins. The original excavators of the space thought that the second floor of the house had only consisted of the balcony room, to which access was afforded by a stair that originated in the south-west corner of the atrium. Yet there would seem to be evidence of a second floor over the back room also, since there are fittings for substantial beams in the back wall. On the other hand, it is not clear how one would have gained access to this room from House 6 unless a second floor also covered part or all of the central 'courtyard', as the stairway postulated by excavators led only to the front balcony room. It is, of course, possible that this room was entered from, and thus formed part of, another house, perhaps House 7 which does indeed show the remains of a stairway along the wall which it shares with House 6. Regardless of which dwelling's inhabitants used the second-floor back room, however, whatever material it contained at the time of the eruption would have been found on the ground floor of House 6. This might well explain both the volume of material found on House 6's ground floor and its variety, from agricultural instruments to finely wrought terracotta lamps.

In addition to the collocation of objects excavated from the house in which the graffito was found, there are other aspects of the space which may complicate our understanding of its inhabitants' class standing. Perhaps most significant for our purposes is the fact that the fauces—where *CIL* 4.

⁶⁷ In the fauces, excavators also found an iron pickaxe.

⁶⁸ All finds reported in Mau (1890) 254.

5296 was discovered—seems to have been more elaborate in decorative style than the rest of the rooms still visible on the ground floor of the house. Although nearly all of the plaster which originally covered the walls of the house has now disappeared, we are fortunate that, in order to preserve CIL 4. 5296, the nineteenth-century excavators also removed part of the original wall decoration of the fauces: red-and-black lines of varying widths run along the walls' margins to frame central white panels. It is far from truly ornate, but in combination with the marble-chip mosaic still in place on the fauces' floor, and the white marble slabs which formed the threshold at entrance and exit, it forms an oddly ornamental entranceway to such a tiny house. Indeed, the original excavators expressed some surprise that the rooms beyond the fauces were so much more simple in their decorative schemata: all were plastered, but there is little other decoration to match either the walls or the floor of the entrance hall.⁶⁹ Moreover, the closing mechanism for the front door of House 6 is remarkably elaborate. There is evidence of two different types of lock, a cross-beam for which holes were sunk into the wall where the fauces meets the street, and U-shaped sockets for braces sunk into the threshold at the other end of the hallway. Wooden struts would have been placed in these sockets and propped against the door at the other end of the fauces to hold it closed.⁷⁰ Although both closing mechanisms are commonly found in Pompeii's wealthy atrium houses, they would have provided a remarkable level of security for a small dwelling such as House 6.

One possible solution to the curious disconnect between the elaborate security and decorative schema of House 6's fauces and its inner rooms is that this space and others nearby—Houses 5 and 7 and perhaps also the network of rooms behind them to the east in Insula 9—were originally part of a single, much larger dwelling. Without further archaeological exploration of the insula, we can only speculate about this, but it certainly appears that the north wall of House 6's central courtyard was a later addition (that is, it originally opened into the space later occupied by 'House 5'). Moreover, the doorway into House 6 is considerably larger than those of the houses to its left and right, perhaps indicating that it originally led into a dwelling of grander scale. It is also worth noting that, located across from the entrance to House 6, there once was an entrance to the large and wealthy House of the Centenary, which occupies most of Regio 9, Insula 8; although this entrance would have led into the back rooms of the house as it was constructed at the time of the eruption, next to it is a small masonry bench, which is a feature often associated with elaborate and heavily used doorways.⁷¹ By 79 CE, however, this back entrance to the House of the Centenary had been blocked up, so that there is no access from the house to the *vicolo* which runs along its

⁶⁹ Mau (1890) 253.

⁷⁰ Marquardt (1990) 228–36.

⁷¹ On which, see Hartnett (2008) 91–119.

eastern side. Again, we cannot currently assess the chronology of the changes in the architecture of House 6 and its neighbours, but it is tempting to associate the closing of the entrance to the House of the Centenary with the transformation of the other side of the *vicolo* into smaller, less elite dwellings. If I am correct, then, in associating the decorative schema of House 6's fauces with the earlier, more elite phase of the dwelling—and the graffiti found there with its later, more plebeian incarnation—we might see in the writing a kind of 'taking possession' of the space by its new inhabitants. By this I do not mean to suggest 'vandalism' and associate graffiti (as is often done) with a disrespect for property sometimes imagined to be a trait of the non-elite social classes. Rather, I think we might read *CIL* 4. 5296 in the same vein as its near neighbour *CIL* 4. 3794, that is, *Aemilius Celer hic habitat*. In the same way that this latter graffito served to announce the identity of, and claim the property for, House 7's signwriting inhabitant, so might the love poem have served as a kind of assertion of identity by the resident of House 6—a gesture of ownership which worked both in response to and along with the decorative schema already in place on the walls and floor of the dwelling's fauces.

A Culture of Quotation: Virgil, Education, and Literary Ownership

Among the curious facts of Campanian wall writing is that one of the earliest recorded texts was a fragment of Euripides, painted in red and black on a wall near the corner of an alleyway in Herculaneum: . . . ὡς ἔν σοφὸν βούλευμα τὰς πολλὰς χεῖρας νικᾷ ('how one wise counsel conquers many hands!'). Found in 1743, the fragment has long since perished, and the excavation methods of the time were such that we cannot even be sure whether the wall in question was outside or inside a building. Indeed, it seems possible that the 'excavators' themselves did not know either.¹ The verse is from the fragmentary *Antiope* (fr. 200 Nauck), part of an apparently famous debate² between the eponymous heroine's twin sons over how to live the most useful and virtuous life: Zethus advocates for athletic and 'manly' pursuits like hunting and warfare; Amphion, the speaker of this line, is in favour of a life spent in art and contemplation. Thus the quotation in context refers to the superiority of the life of the mind (βούλευμα) over the work of the body (χεῖρας), essentially repeating the sentiment expressed in another fragment from the same speech (fr. 199 Nauck), εἰ γὰρ εὖ φρονεῖν ἔχω,/ κρείσσον τόδ' ἔστι καρπεροῦ βραχίονος ('for if I am able to think well, it is more powerful than a strong arm'). The line thus makes an excellent motto for the town of Herculaneum, famously 'quieter'³ and more contemplative than its bustling neighbour to the south, Pompeii.

¹ They describe it as 'un muro, que forma el angulo de una calle' ('a wall which forms the corner of an alleyway'), but the fact that it is listed along with some small domestic finds (a lamp, a small bronze statuette) may indicate that this was a narrow hallway rather than a street: Pannuti (1983) 163–410, at 213.

² On the play and its influence, see Collard, Cropp, and Gibert (2004) 259–71.

³ This is A. Wallace-Hadrill's word: (2011) 292.

Such a reading might perhaps be used to argue for a rather surprising level of familiarity with the work of a fifth-century Greek tragedian among the denizens of a seaside town in Campania. On the other hand, an examination of other ancient texts reveals that the line had achieved proverbial status, since already by the time of Polybius it could be quoted as having been respected ‘for a long time’ (πάλαι: 1. 35. 4). It also appears in Plutarch, Galen, Themistius, and others.⁴ Moreover, if the report from the Herculaneum excavation is to be believed, the line as it appeared on the wall differed in certain minor but significant ways from Euripides’ original, which seems to have had σοφὸν γὰρ ἐν βούλευμα at the start of the line rather than . . . ὡς ἐν σοφὸν βούλευμα. It is the former wording—and, therefore, probably Euripides’ own—which appears in the other ancient sources; only Polybius has it as it appeared in Herculaneum. Polybius’ history is the only ancient *testimonium* which would chronologically precede the Campanian text, and it is theoretically possible that the writer from Herculaneum was quoting from the historian. More likely, though, is that both were working with the same compilation of *sententiae* or maxims, and, indeed, Polybius clearly understands the line to signify something different from what it meant in Euripides’ play. The historian uses it to comment on the story of Marcus Atilius Regulus, whose army was defeated by the military skill of Xanthippus, a Spartan mercenary hired by the Carthaginians to restore their demoralized forces. For Polybius, then, the emphasis in the verse is on the ‘one’ versus the ‘many’, as Xanthippus alone is credited with turning the tide of the war against the vast Roman army. This contrasts with the line’s use in Euripides’ play, where the point is to compare the greater strength of the mind with that of the body—a subtle but important difference in meaning between the original and the quotation.⁵

Of course, we have no way of knowing what the anonymous writer from Herculaneum meant by the quotation of the fragment. If, as I suggested, it was drawn from a collection of proverbs, he or she may not have even known it was composed by Euripides. Indeed, we could compare it with a surviving text from Pompeii, from a store in Regio 8 (4. 7), which features a pair of iambic trimeters in Greek, originally painted in red on an interior wall: ὁ τοῦ Διὸς παῖς καλλίν(ε)ικος Ἑρακλῆς / ἐνθάδ(αι)ε κατοικεῖ μηδὲν εἰσί(αι)τω κακόν. (‘The son

⁴ See Nauck (1885) 52–3.

⁵ F. W. Walbank comments on this: (1945) 1–18, at 5 with n. 3.



Figure 5.1. Plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 733. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. Photograph by author.

of Zeus, Herakles, dazzling in victory, lives here. Let no evil enter!': *CIL* 4. 733.) See Figure 5.1 for a photograph of the fragment, now in the Naples Archeological Museum. This text seems to have been a common one, appearing elsewhere not only on houses but also small amulets, as a fairly generic charm against ill fortune;⁶ it also appears in different versions in stories about Diogenes the Cynic, who uses it as a springboard for ironic comments about social practices.⁷ Although the text as it appears in Pompeii certainly may have had a religious function, it also seems clear that it was meant for display: its medium (red paint), size (large), and location, centred high on the western wall of the shop, all indicate that it was intended to be viewed, by both those already in the shop and those standing outside in the street.⁸ Curiously,

⁶ Merkelbach (1991), 41–3; Faraone (2009) 73–102.

⁷ The text as it is found in Pompeii appears in Diogenes Laertius 6. 50, in which the philosopher observes the text posted above the door of a newlywed and appends his own comment ('after the war, an alliance!'). Cf. Weinreich (1915), 8–18.

⁸ The text is now in the Naples Archaeological Museum, but its original position on the wall of the shop can still be discerned from the space left behind after its removal.

although the orthography is relatively neat, and the text overall fits into a neat oblong shape, the two verses are oddly arranged: the first is written in three lines, in letters almost twice the size of those which comprise the second verse, which appears broken into five lines squeezed together to the left of the god's name and epithet. The spelling, moreover, is particularly poor in the second verse, where 'ai' has twice intruded into words where it has no business. The effect, therefore, would seem to lie as much in the fact of the text—that it exists at all—on the shop's wall as in its display of (Greek) literacy.

It seems possible that, like this second Greek text from Pompeii, the quotation from Euripides in Herculaneum too was meant to communicate something beyond what it actually says. The use to which Polybius puts it—different from the meaning intended by Euripides—indicates the ways in which such tags could and did circulate apart from their original context, testimony not just to their meaningfulness but also their mobility. I have attempted to show throughout this study that what we might call an aesthetic of fragmentation was predominant among the writers of Pompeian poetic graffiti: composition was a communal activity, wherein tags were repeated and recombined in different ways to express different ideas. As discussed in Chapter 4 also, it is tempting to attribute this aesthetic in part to the processes of ancient education and the modes of reading and writing with which they inculcated young Romans. The test case for this question has long been Virgil's *Aeneid*, which we know was used widely as an elementary text and whose fragments have shown up in popular contexts all over the Empire.⁹ This has led to the conclusion that 'Virgil was known at all levels of society'¹⁰ under the early Empire, which has in turn caused some to suggest that the story of Aeneas became a 'national epic . . . a common base of knowledge and culture shared by every Roman, drawing together the disparate population of the empire and helping to create a sense of community'.¹¹ This is a great deal to attribute to any story, let alone any text, before the advent of mass media and in an era when books were both expensive and not widely available.¹² On the other hand, as

⁹ From Silchester in Britain, to Constantinople, to Dura-Europus on the Euphrates: Horsfall (1984) 47–63, at 48–9.

¹⁰ Horsfall (1984) 50.

¹¹ Hedrick (2011) 167–90, at 168.

¹² Hedrick (2011) 181–2.

the quotation from Euripides in Herculaneum shows, the relationship between a work of literature and its role in popular culture can be complicated and difficult to define.

Within discussions of the social role of the *Aeneid*, it is often observed that Pompeian graffiti preserves a remarkable number and range of Virgilian quotations. As is always true, however, the Campanian city's unique state of preservation means that it is difficult to know whether its evidence represents local artistic flourishes or wider cultural trends. Moreover, it is unquestionable that the *Aeneid* represents a special case among works of Roman literature: even before the text was widely available, Propertius celebrated it as 'greater than the *Iliad*' (2. 34. 66); already in his own lifetime, Virgil's work was taught in schools (Suet. *Gramm.* 16); he read parts of the manuscript directly to Augustus and his family, and the *princeps* personally saw to the posthumous publication of the unfinished text (Donatus, *Vit. Virg.* 32, 41). Thus, the *Aeneid*'s canonization was almost a foregone conclusion; this, along with the use of the Trojan myth as a propaganda tool by the Julian gens, means that it would be surprising if we did *not* find traces of Aeneas and his story in the popular culture of Pompeii. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that the vast majority of the graffitied Virgilian quotations are limited to the first words of *Aeneid* books 1 and 2—little more than 'school tags' and not necessarily indicative of a wide-ranging knowledge of Latin literature.¹³ Thus, rather than taking Pompeii's wall texts as evidence parallel to, and on the same level as, the volume of Virgil found in more clearly 'literary' contexts,¹⁴ this chapter attempts to see the graffitied *Aeneid* quotations in their own terms, as evidence of a mode of reading and writing particular to this most canonical of Latin texts in this least canonical of ancient written forms. What will emerge is not a comprehensive explanation of literary quotation in early imperial Pompeii, but one account of the complicated ways in which 'literary literacy' could be displayed and deconstructed in ancient Roman wall writing.

¹³ Harris (1989) 261; Franklin (1996/7) 175–84.

¹⁴ Papyrus fragments, quotations in 'learned' contexts (deathbeds and the like), artistic representations: see Horsfall (1995) 244–55.

ARMS AND THE MAN

We have known for many years that the story of Aeneas enjoyed a 'popular' following under the early Roman Empire. This is illustrated in Pompeii by the wide variety of representations of the hero found there, which range from panel paintings in elite houses to small decorative terracotta statuettes.¹⁵ Much of this evidence relates to the so-called Trojan group, the depiction of Aeneas leading his son Ascanius and carrying his aged father Anchises, who himself carries the *cista sacra* containing the Penates.¹⁶ This grouping had long since been given a stable, canonized form, traceable back to the statue which was erected by Augustus among the *summi viri* who graced the exedra of his imperial forum.¹⁷ That statue was then reproduced in numerous contexts and media all over the empire, from coins to lamps to relief sculpture and public dedications. In Pompeii it is found in different media, frequently matched with the image of Romulus carrying the *spolia opima*; Ovid (*Fasti* 5. 563–6) provides the useful information that the two statues were placed opposite each other in Augustus' Forum, clearly the motivation for their pairing in Pompeii. Ovid also notes that the *summi viri* in Rome were accompanied by *elogia* which appeared beneath them to identify and describe the heroes' actions. This is important data for Pompeii because fragments of a bronze copy of the Romulus *elogium* were found still *in situ* in the building of Eumachia in the Forum, leading to the reasonable supposition that his statue appeared there too; nearby, it is also suggested, was a copy of the Trojan group along with Aeneas' *elogium*, whose fragments were found scattered inside the building.¹⁸ There is even a famous parody of the group, with its human figures replaced by dogs or apes, from Pompeii.¹⁹ Other depictions of Aeneas in the city are more heroic: a painting of his battle with Achilles from the House of the Cryptoporticus; Aeneas receiving his armour from Venus; the wounded Aeneas from the House of Siricus.²⁰ In a

¹⁵ A summary of the evidence appears in Galinsky (1969) 8, 26–32.

¹⁶ See Figure 5.2 for a painted version of the group, as was found outside the 'House of Fabius Ululitremulus' (Pompeii 9. 13. 4).

¹⁷ Camaggio (1928) 125–47.

¹⁸ van Buren (1925) 103–13, at 108–10.

¹⁹ Cèbe (1966) 369. It is worth noting that this painting seems to have appeared along with a parodic one of Romulus, also as an animal, carrying the *spolia*: see de Vos (1991) 113–23.

²⁰ Galinsky (1969) 26–9.



Figure 5.2. Fresco showing Aeneas fleeing Troy with Anchises and Ascanius ('The Trojan Group'), originally located outside Pompeii 9. 13. 4. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. Photograph by Michael Larvey.

cheaper, less elite medium, three small terracotta statuettes survived from the city which reproduce the 'Trojan group'.²¹

The proliferation around Pompeii of images of Aeneas, however, does not actually tell us anything about familiarity with the words of Virgil's text about him. Indeed, N. Horsfall has suggested that the evidence for the *Aeneid's* direct influence on many pieces of Roman imperial art has been greatly overstated.²² Certainly, Tacitus reports that the affection which Augustus personally had for the poet was 'not lacking among the populace' (*caruit neque apud populum Romanum: Dialog. 13.1*) and that, upon hearing some of his verses, a theatrical audience once acclaimed him in the same manner they greeted the

²¹ Naples Museum Inv. 110338, 110342, 20597. Levi (1926) 193 no. 842, fig. 143. Note that the first two seem to have been made from the same mould, while the third has a different form.

²² Horsfall (1984) 52–9.

princeps (*veneratus est sic quasi Augustum: Dialog.* 13. 2). But exactly what role Virgil's text had in the streets of the ancient city is still very much an open question. In answering it, Pompeii's graffiti provide an invaluable, albeit not entirely transparent, set of data. From them, it is clear that *arma virumque cano*, at the very least, was a well-known phrase: often shortened simply to *arma virumq*, it is found quoted at least fifteen times in the graffiti from Pompeii, in material contexts which range from the walls of cookshops to the interiors of wealthy houses.²³ Indeed, the phrase was so well known that it might be construed as a kind of common language, as is suggested in *CIL* 4. 2361 where it is found preceded by the words *carmina communemne*. The grammar of this comment is difficult to construe, and since the plaster fragment has long since disappeared we must trust the nineteenth-century excavators for the reading of the text. Still, the words would seem to imply something about 'common' or 'vulgar song', which, given the number and geographical spread of *arma virumque* quotations in the graffiti, would seem to be a legitimate description at least of the first words of Virgil's text.

On the other hand, the identification of *arma virumque* as a *carmen* is peculiar in the context of graffiti writing. Certainly, as I have noted, the tension between the oral and written aspects of ancient literature are very evident in Pompeian wall texts—as they are, to a greater or lesser extent, in the work of the canonical poets of the early Empire. It is curious, therefore, how thoroughly the graffiti authors embrace their role as 'writers'. We have numerous instances of signatures to graffiti texts which employ forms of the verb *scribo* ('So-and-so wrote this')²⁴ and others which clearly allude to the creation of a graffiti text as writing: e.g. (following an obscene joke) 'he writes it who knows about it';²⁵ 'as many times as I wrote, you also once and for all are reading (it)';²⁶ 'Lesbianus, you shit and you write "hello"'.²⁷ In addition, we have a number of texts which play on the

²³ See Appendix 5.1 for a complete list. Cf. Della Corte (1940) 171–8; Hoogma (1959); Franklin (1996/7).

²⁴ e.g. (among many others) *CIL* 4. 1520, *scripsit Venus Fisica Pompeiana*; 4. 1841 *scribit Narcissus*; 4. 2395, *scribet Sabinus*; 4. 4925, *Anteros hoc scripsit*; 4. 8259, *scribit rivalis*; etc.

²⁵ *scribit qui novit* (4. 4239);

²⁶ *quot scripsi semel et legis* (4. 1860).

²⁷ *Lesbiana, cacas scribisque [sa]lute(m)* (*CIL* 4. 10070). Cf. Martial (12. 61. 7–10): *quaeras, censeo, si legi laboras, | nigri fornicis ebrium poetam, | qui carbone rudi*

written materiality of the graffito text, perhaps most famously the couplet found scratched several times in different parts of the city: *Admiror o paries te non cecidisse ruinis | qui tot scriptorum taedia sustineas* ('I'm amazed, wall, that you haven't fallen down in ruins, | since you bear the tedious outpourings of so many writers': *CIL* 4. 1904).²⁸ Other examples include *CIL* 4. 1234, *pupa quae bela is, tibi | me misit qui tuus es<t>. vale* ('girl, you who are lovely: he who is yours sends me to you. farewell'). The epistolary form here—seen in the verb *misit* and the final *vale*—is the rather feeble joke, since the text is stationary and the girl (any beautiful girl who comes by, presumably) must come to it. Thus, unlike canonical Latin poets, who seem to have a certain ambivalence about the material aspects of book production,²⁹ graffiti authors repeatedly call attention to the written aspect of their work.

I would certainly not insist on making a strong distinction between the vocabulary of authorship in the Pompeian graffiti and that found in canonical Latin literature—prose authors such as Livy and Cicero, after all, often speak of themselves and their literary models as *scriptores* without any apparent hesitation. But I do think that it is important to consider the ways in which the appellation 'writer' signifies differently when found in a graffito text and (for example) in the preface to Livy's 142-book history. That is to say that when Livy refers to his relationship to other 'writers' (*novi . . . scriptores; in tanta scriptorum turba: AUC* pref. 2–3) and their practice of 'writing' (*scribendi*: pref. 2), he underscores both the materiality of his own work and the material tradition of which it is a part; the *Ab Urbe Condita* thus takes its place as a book in a long line of books on the subject of Roman history. The materiality of the graffito text, by contrast, is much more local and immediate; when a wall text tells

putrique creta | scribit carmina, quae legunt cacantes ('I tell you, if you want to be read about, you should look for a drunk poet of the dark brothel, who, with crude charcoal and crumbling chalk, writes poems which people read while they shit').

²⁸ Cf. *CIL* 4. 2360, which plays with the relationship between writer, text, and reader: *Amat qui scribet, pedicatur qui leget, | qui opsultat prurit, paticus est qui praeterit. | Ursi me comedant; et ego verpa qui lego* ('He loves, the one who writes; the one who reads is fucked, The critic wants it bad. Who passes by? He sucks. Bears eat me! I'm the reader and a dickhead too.') The joke in this instance is compounded if we imagine someone reading this text aloud and ending with the statement in the final line. For a discussion, see Ch. 1.

²⁹ See e.g. Farrell (2009) 164–85; but cf. Parker (2009) 186–232.

us that ‘So-and-so wrote this’ it deliberately calls attention not just to the meaning of the words themselves but to the act of inscription which created them. Thus, as self-consciously written documents, graffiti must be understood in relation to the various other writing practices which gave structure to social interactions in Roman culture. These include not just literary composition or the exchange of epistles, but other texts which make up the ‘literate landscape’ of the ancient city, ranging from notices advertising rental properties, to the painted street signs which enjoin the passer-by not to foul the foot-path, to inscriptions on the bases of honorific statues in the forum. As we will see, the Pompeian wall texts represent the meeting point between two different genres of writing, between pragmatic, urban, everyday texts and those which emerged from the sphere of elite cultural production.

In this context it is worth taking note of one instance in which the first words of the *Aeneid* are found not scratched but painted on a wall in Pompeii. On a wall to the south of the city, in Regio 1, was found a programma which supports a certain Gaius Cuspius Pansa for aedile (*CIL* 4. 7129)—a notice which was painted over a number of others which are difficult to disentangle from one another. From Matteo Della Corte’s line drawing in his 1911 excavation notebook (Figure 5.3), it is clear that the notice supporting Cuspius Pansa was the freshest when the city was destroyed; on the basis of this and other evidence, it has been concluded that he was standing for aedile in the elections of 79.³⁰ Below it in the same black paint is a small, two-line phrase written neatly in block letters which reads *arma virumque | cano Troiae q(arm—*that is, the first four words of the *Aeneid*, an abbreviation of the fifth (*qui*), and another *arma* to start the quotation all over again. It is difficult to be certain exactly what relation these words have to the programmata above them, but a few circumstances lead me to connect them at least tangentially with the one supporting Cuspius Pansa. First, like that advertisement, they were written in black paint. Instances of ‘random’ painting in Pompeii are rare; unlike the modern day, private or unauthorized graffiti tended to

³⁰ Franklin (1980), 61–2 with table 6; cf. 48. The situation is slightly confused by the fact that there were actually three C. Cuspii Pansae who were active in Pompeian politics, the candidate for aedile in 79, his father, and his grandfather. *CIL* 4. 7129, however, was painted over an advertisement for Paquius for duovir—this must be P. Paquius Proculus, who stood for that office in 74 (Franklin (1980) 67 and table 6).

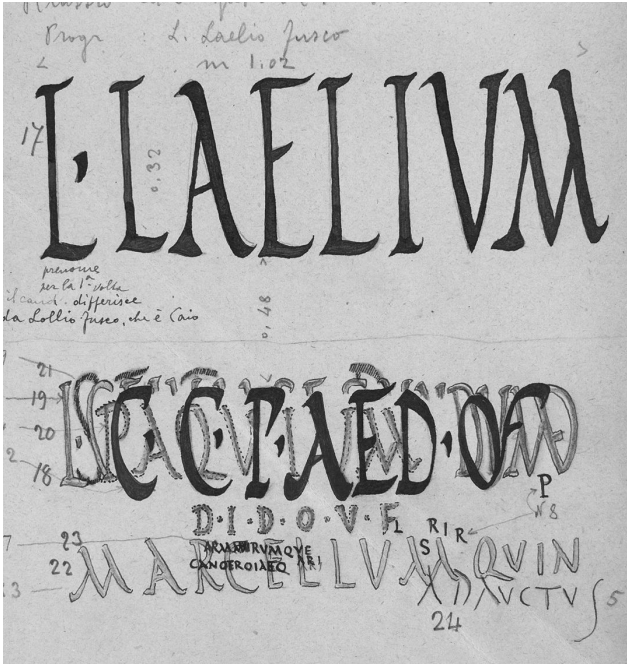


Figure 5.3. M. Della Corte, drawing of CIL 4. 7129–31. Courtesy of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2002.M.16).

be scratched into plaster rather than presented in the more elaborate medium of the professional signwriters. Secondly, the words were written over an advertisement for a certain Marcellus, who was standing for the senior post of *quinquennalis*. Although the bare cognomen makes it difficult to identify the exact candidate, the quinquennial elections were only held once every five years. It is possible that this notice is left over from the elections of 70, but its neat placement below the second line of the advertisement for Paquius for Duovir (from the election of 74) makes it seem more likely that it dates to the quinquennial elections of 75. Thus, the words from the *Aeneid* would have to have been painted between 75 and the city's destruction in August of 79; the only other painting activity, also in black, on this section of wall during that time was the advertisement for Cuspius Pansa which must have gone up in the first months of 79. Finally, it is important to remember that this section of wall—admittedly the site of quite a flurry of painting

activity over the years before Pompeii's destruction—was surrounded by untouched white plaster, so that, had the painter wished simply to leave the words as a random unattached trace, there were many meters of open wall from which he could have chosen.

But exactly what function does the *Aeneid* quotation have here? Before we become too embroiled in speculation about this question, it is worth noting that signwriters in other contexts seem to have been guilty of filling in space with words and phrases unrelated to the candidate or event they were hired to advertise. Often these relate to the activities of the sign painter himself, as for example in *CIL* 4. 3884 where, beside a notice advertising a gladiatorial combat, we are offered the information that 'Aemeilius Celer wrote this, alone, by the light of the moon' (*scripsit Aemilius Celer singulus ad lunam*). More puzzling is *CIL* 4. 7679, an advertisement for 'Gavius' for aedile. Painted beneath the usual *GAVIUM AED*, however, is the neatly lettered sentence *Marcellus Praenestinam amat et non curatur* ('Marcellus loves Praenestia and isn't cared for (by her?)'). It seems doubtful that this last sentiment has anything to do with Gavius' candidacy, although it neatly fills in the space which in traditional programmata is used to express the candidate's qualifications and the name or names of his supporters. Although this 'local gossip' may have had meaning to some readers, it seems likely that to others—especially those whose literacy was minimal—the words would simply function as part of the apparatus of the sign, less significant for what they say than the fact that someone paid to have them said.

It is perhaps in this vein that we should see the quotation from the *Aeneid* in the advertisement for Cuspius Pansa: while it is possible that certain readers might recognize the words as a 'learned' quotation, others might simply see them as words and nothing more. They might—and in the case of those whose literacy only extended to being able to pick out the letters of names and offices, surely did—simply extend visually the space of the sign supporting Cuspius Pansa. Here again it is important to note that the black colour of the paint used in the programma for Cuspius Pansa and the words of the *Aeneid* serves both to connect these two texts to one another and to differentiate them from the earlier writing on this part of the wall, which was all done in red. I would argue, however, that in addition to this basic visual and pragmatic reading of the *Aeneid* quotation, there is also a second, more 'literary', interpretation which should be seen. As I have already noted, the first words of Virgil's text are written below the

second line of the advertisement for Paquius for duovir, the first line (reading simply *Paquium*) lying underneath the letters of the programma for Cuspius Pansa. The second line consists of a series of letters which abbreviate some standard words and formulae: *D. I. D. O. V. F.*, which stands for *duumvirum iure dicundo oro vos faciatis* ('I ask that you make [Paquius] duovir for declaring the law'). There is nothing terribly remarkable about this, but an examination of Della Corte's drawing of the wall shows that the *Aeneid* quotation is placed neatly under the first four letters—which, it will be noted, spell DIDO, the name of Aeneas' doomed lover in book 4 of Virgil's text.³¹ In other words, the *Aeneid* quotation here does seem to have both context and some content, although it is noteworthy that the painter did not quote book 4 or any other lines from the epic which directly relate to Dido. Rather, he provided the most remembered and easily recognizable words from the text as a whole, so that the joke, if we may call it that, is still fairly basic, requiring only the ability to recognize *arma virumque* as the first words of Virgil's text and 'Dido' as the name of a central character within it.

The programma for Cuspius Pansa thus neatly illustrates my earlier point about Pompeian wall writing: that it represents the meeting of two very different kinds of writing practice, what we may term the pragmatic and the literary.³² This is not to say that we should attribute to the Pompeian signwriter a great knowledge of Virgil's text; far from it, since one way of reading the final, repeated *arma* is to suppose that the writer could not continue the quotation past *Troiae qui* and so started over again at the beginning to fill in the remaining space. In fact, what I would like to underscore is how the opening words of the *Aeneid* have here been redeployed as part of the discourse of advertisement: on the one hand, the words function

³¹ Play on the practice of abbreviating words in programmata is attested in Cicero's *De Oratore* (2. 59. 240), where the letters LLLMM in a political notice from Terracina, which might have stood for something like *Lege Laetus Lubens Merito Memmium*, are interpreted as *Lacerat Lacertum Largi Mordax Memmius*—an insult to the candidate rather than a recommendation.

³² Indeed, it may be worth noting that this Cuspius Pansa is also the subject of another programma which incorporates poetry, in this second instance much more systematically. Nearby, also in Regio 1, we find another notice which supports him for aedile, again adding a slightly misconstrued couplet: *C. Cuspium Aed. Si qua verecunde viventi gloria danda est | huic iuveni debet gloria digna dari* ('C. Cuspius for Aedile: if any honour should be given to one living modestly | fitting honour ought to be given to this young man': *CIL* 4. 7201). For a discussion, see Ch. 2.

simply as words, verbiage that both displays the signwriter's skill in writing and his ability to construct a visually appealing notice; on the other hand, the literariness of the phrase, and the joke it expresses, must have been visible to some readers, who might then see an association between the 'learned' gesture and the candidate being supported. In other words, a fragment like *arma virumque cano* is significant here precisely because the words no longer say what they purport to say. The writer is not actually attempting to communicate that he himself is singing about arms and the man, or even necessarily that he agrees with Virgil that singing arms and the man is an important or illustrious thing to do. On the other hand, he also did not write a series of random or simply banal words like 'man wood dog' or 'sheep are fat', nor did he write a message which could be construed as a personal sentiment even if it was not, e.g. 'I love you' or 'power to the people'. Instead, he selected a phrase which, as a function of its literary heritage, seems to say something important beyond what the words themselves signify; thus, the opening of Virgil's *Aeneid* is here useful because what it means goes beyond what the words actually say.

It is that sense of meaningfulness which is produced by the association between the words and Virgil's text. But it is also true that the quotation does not depend solely on recall of the *Aeneid* to signal its origins: its literariness is additionally expressed in its dactylic rhythm, its invocation of Troy, and especially by the verb *cano*. Among Pompeian wall texts, which, as I have noted, frequently foreground the fact that they are part of a written medium, 'I sing' necessarily invokes a different discourse: other than in quotations of the first line of the *Aeneid*, the word is only found in two other places on walls in the ancient city, both of which (I would argue) are deliberately employing literary language. The irony here is that, by writing a word for verbal performance (*cano*), the writer of the Pompeian text sounds bookish, by which I do not just mean he sounds learned but rather as though he has been reading something other than walls in Pompeii. One of the things which serves to signal the quotation as a quotation, of a literary medium, is the fact that it represents in writing an imagined oral event.³³ This is not, I hasten to add, to say that

³³ We might compare *CIL* 4. 9848, which is a rare instance of the verb *cano* used in Pompeian wall writing outside of a quotation of the first line of the *Aeneid*. Here the phrase *hic duo rivales ca[n]ont* ('here two rivals sang') appears beneath two lines of verse quoted from Ovid and Propertius. For a discussion, see Ch. 1.

Virgil's text was understood to be a 'real' song which people actually sang. My point is rather that the idea of a sung poem is, within the context of the graffiti, anomalous, so that the use of *cano* necessarily invokes the high literary tradition represented by Virgil rather than the general discourse of graffiti.

The question which I am trying to address here is not so much why people wrote the first line of the *Aeneid* on walls in Pompeii, but rather why they wrote the first line of the *Aeneid* as opposed to something else. Again, the answer to this question probably varies from instance to instance, but as a general observation it is worth noting the wide mobility of *arma virumque*—words which especially when quoted without the governing verb *cano*, as very frequently occurs in the Pompeian graffiti, are literally meaningless except as a reminder of Virgil's text. This reflects, of course, the popularity of the *Aeneid* particularly, but it is also true that poetic quotation far outstrips citations from prose in ancient wall writing. Since so much ancient literature has been lost, it is of course possible that there are citations or parodies in the graffiti which we cannot recognize, but it is remarkable how few references to known Latin prose works there are in all Pompeian wall texts.³⁴ In contrast, Pompeian walls preserve direct quotations from a number of different canonical Latin poets, from Ennius (*CIL* 4. 3135 and 7353) to Propertius (*CIL* 4. 1520, 1894, 4491, 9847) and Ovid (*CIL* 4. 1324, 1893, 1895, 1520, 3149, 9847).³⁵ Virgil's *Eclogues* are also in evidence (see Appendix 5.1), although I am not convinced that what Della Corte (1940: 175) describes as the single 'quotation' from the *Georgics* actually is one.³⁶

³⁴ There are, in fact, no direct quotations, and only a few vague allusions. One such is *CIL* 4.1261, a poorly spelled inscription from the outside wall of the 'House of the Tragic Poet': *futebatur inquam futuebatur civium Romanorum atractis pedibus cunus, in qua nule aliae veces erant nisissei dulcissime et pissimae* ('Fucked, I say, fucked with legs drawn back was the cunt of the citizens of Rome, during which there was no sound except moans sweet and respectful'). It has been hypothesized that this is a parody of a passage from one of Cicero's *Verrines*, in which a man under torture refuses to make any sound except to say 'I am a Roman citizen' (*civis Romanus sum*: *Verr.* 2. 5. 162). See Cugusi (1985) 23–9. For a fairly exhaustive catalogue of all quotations from, and references to, Greek and Latin literature in Pompeian graffiti, see Gigante (1979).

³⁵ A glance at the index to Gigante (1979) 253–63 suggests the wide range, although he is far more inclined than I to see allusions to canonical authors.

³⁶ *matris Eleusinae*, in *CIL* 4. 8560 and 8610, but this is simply a name for Demeter which could have been common. When the two words appear in *Georgics* 1. 163, moreover, they are in reverse order (*Eleusinae matris*). Horsfall (1984) 51 is similarly dubious.

As I mentioned, we have yet to formulate a viable explanation of what function such quotations had in Roman popular culture generally or Pompeian graffiti particularly, although it seems likely that poetry was more popular than prose because of the former's prominence in elementary education: Quintilian notes that passages from poetry are useful because 'learning them is more pleasing to children' (*namque eorum cognitio parvis gratior est: Inst.* 1. 36. 2), and we have numerous instances in the papyri of phrases from canonical poets being used as copy-models.³⁷ But, again, the fact that someone may have memorized the first line of Virgil's *Aeneid* in school does not on its own explain why he or she would write that line on a particular wall in Pompeii, or what a reader might have been imagined to take away after stopping to peruse the text.

We are fortunate, therefore, to have one instance in the Pompeian graffiti where an author is more explicit about the relationship of his/her text to Virgil's original. Outside the so-called House of Fabius Ululitremulus appears a painted version of Aeneas, Ascanius, and Anchises which flanks the main door on one side (Figure 5.2); across from it in a parallel painting is the figure of Romulus bearing the *spolia opima*.³⁸ Nearby was found scratched a witty hexameter: *fullones ululamque cano, non arma virumque* ('I sing the fullers and the screech owl, not arms and the man').³⁹ Matteo Della Corte, among others, suggested that the screech owl was a bird sacred to the fullers and associated with them, probably because of the connection between the bird and their patron goddess Minerva.⁴⁰ On the other hand, a fragment of Varro's *Menippean Satires* offers the proverbial phrase, *homines eum peius formidant quam fullo ululam* ('men fear him worse than the fuller fears the screech owl': *Sat. Men.* 86. 4), which suggests a particular aversion between the bird and the woolworker—although it has been suggested that the 'fear' here is more of a sense of religious awe.⁴¹ The name of the building on whose face the graffito was found, moreover, arises from a programma found written below the image of Romulus and above the *fullones ululamque* graffito; it announces that Fabius Ululitremulus ('owl-

³⁷ Criboire (2001) 134–5.

³⁸ On the space, see Spinazzola (1953) 147–55.

³⁹ See Figure 5.4 for a line drawing of the original text.

⁴⁰ Della Corte (1965) 336.

⁴¹ Moeller (1976) 89–90, but cf. Courtney (1995) 281.

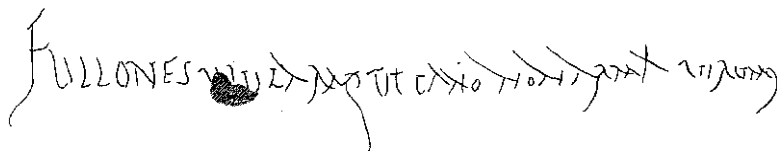


Figure 5.4. Line drawing of *CIL* 4. 9131, from *CIL* vol. 4, suppl. 3, pt. 2.

fearer’) recommends Gaius Cuspius Pansa and Popidius Secundus for the position of aediles. It seems legitimate that we should take this Ululitremulus as a fuller, on the basis both of his cognomen (which seems to allude to the proverbial phrase above) and the fact that the word *fullones* was scratched several times on both sides of the programma. The fullers and their screech owl, therefore, seem to have a popular, proverbial connection, expressed in both Ululitremulus’ name and in the graffito cited above.

It should be noted here that the traditional assumption, originated by Matteo Della Corte in his *Case ed abitanti a Pompei*,⁴² that the programmata provide us with the names of a house’s inhabitants has been largely discredited,⁴³ especially in cases such as this one where excavation was halted before the interior of the building could provide any more information. We do not know whose house this was—or, indeed, that it was a house at all⁴⁴—so that the presence of the programma by Fabius Ululitremulus in this particular place could be due to a number of different factors. What is curious, however, and (I would argue) significant for the question of ‘literary literacy’ in Pompeii is the way that the *fullones ululamque* graffito may be seen as responding to and connecting the painting of the Trojan group and the programma. That is, one way of understanding the ‘witty’ hexameter is as a response to both paintings, one which expresses a preference for Ululitremulus and his profession over Aeneas and his story: ‘I sing the fullers and their screech owl, NOT arms and the man’. On one level, then, the graffito may be understood as engaging the visual competition between the programma and the painting—between, that is, the formal decorative element represented by the

⁴² Della Corte (1965).

⁴³ Already in his 1955 review of the second edition, A. Degraasi raises some pointed objections: Degraasi (1955) 141–9, at 142–3; cf. Castrén (1975) 31–3.

⁴⁴ Moeller (1976) 51 assumes that it was a fullery.

Trojan group and the much more informal and ‘popular’ advertisement embodied in the election notice.⁴⁵

In addition, however, I would argue that there is also a sense of poetic competition embedded in the graffito. Like the line from the *Aeneid* which it parodies, the graffito has the form of a hexameter. That is, it gives its song of ‘the fullers and their owl’ the same poetic form which Virgil had given his ‘arms and the man’, so that the graffito has a kind of tongue-in-cheek grandiosity which serves as part of its humour. But equally significant is the fact that the *fullones ululamque* graffito appears immediately below another fragment of a hexameter line written in what Della Corte, at any rate, thought was the same hand. This graffito reads *quisquis amat valeat pereat* or ‘whoever loves let him be well; let him perish . . .’. This is, of course, also a quotation—not, this time, of a great canonical author, but of a poetic line which we know only from Pompeian graffiti. As I have noted before (Chapter 3), fuller forms of the verse are found in a number of other places in the city, in different forms and in combination with other ‘independent’ poetic efforts. It is clear that the phrase is a stock one in Pompeian graffiti writing, part of the canon of street poetry but not of elite Latin literature.

The appearance of *quisquis amat valeat* on the wall here in company with *fullones ululamque cano* suggests a further dimension of ‘literary literacy’ in Pompeian wall writing. That is, the latter text indicates a fairly high level of knowledge about Virgil’s text, especially if we connect it with the painting of Aeneas and see it as a ‘reading’ of the decorative elements on the wall. As a parody, moreover, it is effective, particularly because the author possessed enough knowledge to compose his/her own hexameter. *Quisquis amat*, however, is quoted directly, not apparently in jest but simply as a quotation, not unlike the use of the first line of the *Aeneid* we saw in the earlier advertisement for Cuspius Pansa. And as I remarked of that instance, the quoted words here are significant precisely because they do not mean what they say; their function is to look and sound like something important rather than to convey information or meaning. Yet if

⁴⁵ It is perhaps also worth noting that the programma here is again supporting C. Cuspius Pansa for aedile, as was the notice above which employed the quotation from Virgil. Especially taken along with the notice which supports him with an attempted elegiac couplet (discussed earlier) it seems that his supporters were a rather ‘literary’ crowd.

we look back to the inscriptions outside the ‘house’ of Fabius Ululitremulus, it is worth noting that, here, the quotation of the *Aeneid*’s first words has been given content and context by both the parodic change to the line and the surrounding environment in which it appears. Rather than representing a slavish repetition of the canonical text, the parody invests Virgil’s text with meaning, as the thing against which the new ‘song of the fullers’ will be measured. The earliest commentators on the graffito spent some energy imagining the real song which is reflected here—was it a sort of guild chant or something more like a popular ditty? This, to my mind, is missing the obvious joke of the text, which is encapsulated in *cano* as it is transferred from the epic ‘arms and the man’ to the much more pedestrian ‘fullers and the screech owl’. The point is that in neither case is anyone actually singing; *cano* is funny here because it evokes a world of elite literary performance—perhaps in contrast with the ‘song’ of the owl which gave the *ulula* its name—while its written form reminds us that even Virgil’s song had long since been circulating as a material text.

In a certain sense, the play between spoken and written word animates a great deal of ancient poetry—even, it might be argued, Virgil’s original *arma virumque cano*. The opening of *Aeneid* 2 with *conticuere omnes* (‘everyone was silent’), moreover, makes a neat contrast with the poet’s emphatic speaking which commenced book 1. In fact, this latter phrase is quoted almost as frequently in the Pompeian graffiti as *Aeneid* 1. 1, a circumstance which has been taken to indicate the particular reading and memorizing patterns of the ancient populace (see Appendix 5.1 for a list of instances). It may well be true that books 1 and 2 of Virgil’s epic poem were the most popular in early imperial Rome, but I would also point to the ways in which *conticuere omnes*, like *arma virumque cano*, underscores itself as a quotation by representing in writing a spoken act, or, rather, an unspoken one, which does the opening of the *Aeneid* one better. The joke of writing ‘everyone was silent’ on a wall—especially a wall which most of the time also contained other graffiti—is not just to nudge the reader to recall happy days in the schoolroom—consuming Virgil’s poem; it also serves to call attention to the lack of silence, or the lack of a lack of speech, which is represented by the presence of the words on the wall. In the same sense that *arma virumque cano*, when quoted out of context, does not mean anyone is actually singing, so *conticuere omnes* does not mean anyone is in reality silent. Again, the point of the quoted words is not to mean what they say, but rather to call attention to themselves as quotations,

in part by invoking the world of poetic spoken communication which is external to the written world of graffiti.

My point is that these Virgilian quotations stand out from the other wall writings because they do not sound like locally authored graffiti. But their discursive difference does not just lie in their vocabulary or metrical form; it is also visible in the speech acts they describe and the way they describe them. Singing and silence may be seen as two parallel poles, each articulating something which does not happen in graffiti writing: the first because graffiti is conventionally seen as a written form and not part of the world of elite song, and the second because, by definition, the production of a wall text disrupts the blank stillness of virgin plaster. On the other hand, to the extent that *arma virumque* might be described as 'a popular song' (one possible translation for *carmina communemne*) it takes its place alongside tags like *quisquis amat*, as part of the standard playbook of Pompeian graffiti writers. It should be noted, however, that even in those instances where we see some suggestion that the writer knew there to be some connection between the words *arma virumque* and Virgil's text generally, that knowledge does not seem to have run deep. In the case of the programma for Cuspius Pansa, 'DIDO' may have suggested the *Aeneid* to the painter, but he does not quote book 4, or anything beyond the first four words of the text. Outside the house of Fabius Ululitremulus, the pairing of the parody with the image of Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius might initially suggest an association between the 'Trojan group' and the *Aeneid*. Yet careful examination of the evidence reveals that the graffito in question was found beneath the image of Romulus carrying the *spolia opima* rather than that of Aeneas and his family. Did the writer, then, really see the words of Virgil's text as relating to the image on the opposite side of the door? Especially since, between the two representations, it is Romulus who is more clearly depicted with *arma* (in addition to the *spolia*, he is carrying a spear), it seems possible that the parodist did not associate his words with Aeneas at all.

SPEAKING OUT

Thus far, we have been focusing on the opening phrases of the first books of the *Aeneid*, phrases which seem to have enjoyed significant

popularity in many different contexts and locations. *Arma virumque cano*, especially, probably circulated as a phrase almost independently from the rest of Virgil's text, and was probably consumed and reproduced by people who had only the vaguest notion of what connection it had with the great epic poem. Yet the Pompeian graffiti also offer us a selection of other quotations from the *Aeneid* whose 'popularity' is not so easily identified or understood.⁴⁶ That is, we know that the *Aeneid* played a significant role in ancient education, as one of the standard texts for learning everything from syntax to ethics; Robert Kaster famously offered a vivid description of the 'sacredness' of Virgil's text among the Latin grammarians in the third and fourth centuries, who used him to create an educated elite 'as superior to the uneducated as they are to cattle'.⁴⁷ The further quotations—that is, those which are neither *arma virumque cano* nor *conticuere omnes*—from Virgil's text which we find in Pompeii have usually been attributed to the priority which the *Aeneid* was given in the ancient schoolroom. At the same time, however, these are often passages whose thematic or educational significance are not immediately obvious, and they are generally not lines to which the later grammarians—who, admittedly, represent a much later period in ancient education—give much attention.

This is not to say that formal education, as represented in our extant manuals of rhetorical pedagogy, is not evident in Pompeian graffiti. For example, in 1984 W. D. Lebek brilliantly identified a previously puzzling inscription as a tag attested in Quintilian.⁴⁸ *CIL* 4. 6819, from the wall of the fauces in the House of the Golden Cupids, had languished uninterpreted for almost a hundred years before he saw it as *quinq(u)a[gi]genta | uberant | exinde ocio*—or, in other words, a mangled version of the hexameter *quingenta ubi erant centum inde occidit Achilles* ('Achilles slew fifty out of the hundred which were there': *Inst.* 7. 9. 8). The Latin is a translation of a line of Greek known from Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* 1. 4, where the philosopher notes its grammatical and logical ambiguity; Quintilian is more direct in his reading of the Latin version, noting that one must rely on vocal emphasis in order to distinguish the correct interpretation (above) from the nonsensical ('Achilles slew a

⁴⁶ For a fairly comprehensive list, see Della Corte (1940), with a few additions which can be found in the appendix of Hoogma (1959).

⁴⁷ Kaster (1988) 17.

⁴⁸ Lebek (1984) 70–2.

hundred from the fifty who were there'). In other words, despite its invocation of Achilles and its 'literary' form, what we know of this line from elsewhere indicates that it was used in rhetorical education to teach a fairly simple point, akin (as Lebek points out) to imaginary and actual examples put forward in modern education to highlight uses of the comma.⁴⁹ This reading of *CIL* 4. 6819 may suggest that other texts, including but not limited to those found nearby,⁵⁰ may also be linked to education—not so much in terms of high-level literary analysis, but as ready-to-hand illustrations of particular basic rules.

Turning back to the *Aeneid*, then, it is important to be precise about our meaning when we say, for instance, that it was 'part of the furniture of the minds of educated Romans'.⁵¹ That is, it is clear that on some level for some people, Virgil's epic framed their experience of themselves as Romans, living under more or less autocratic rule, in a vast and confusing empire.⁵² Virgil himself may well have understood this as being a part of the use-value of his text, and therefore included such imperialist sentiments as those expressed by Anchises in book 6: 'You, Roman, remember, rule the nations with your power; | these will be your skills: to put your mark on peace | to spare the conquered and throw down the proud' (*Aen.* 6. 851–3). The spread of the text around the Empire, as seen in the multitude of quotations in popular contexts, has been seen as an index of the success of the cultural project to bind people together by means of a common culture, a project which some critics famously attempted to replicate for post-war Europe.⁵³ But we should not let Virgil's history and reception among the elite dictate how we think about 'educated' or

⁴⁹ Lebek (1984) 70, writing in German, offers the example of 'Zehn Finger hab' ich an jeder Hand, fünfundzwanzig an Händen und Füßen' (vs. 'Zehn Finger hab' ich, an jeder Hand fünf, und zwanzig an Händen und Füßen'). In English, we might include the apocryphal 'I'd like to dedicate this book to my parents, Ayn Rand and God'.

⁵⁰ e.g. *CIL* 4. 6820, *Sic Cotini voto post fata novissima* ('Thus, by the prayer of Cotinus (?) after the most recent fortune'). The line is grammatically and metrically incomplete, lacking the final spondee to make a hexameter. It seems possible that—depending on how the line finished—it may have been meant to illustrate the ambiguity between the nominative plural (the Cotini were a Celtic tribe) and the genitive singular (Cotinus could be either a name or a reference to a shrub used for dye: Plin. *NH* 16. 73).

⁵¹ Martindale (1997) 1–18, at 1.

⁵² As is well analysed in e.g. Reed (2010) 66–79.

⁵³ Perhaps most notably, T. S. Eliot: see Eliot (1957) 135–48.

'literate' knowledge in Roman Pompeii. It is important to distinguish knowing a line of Virgil from knowing the entire *Aeneid*, and being able to quote a verse from understanding what it meant in its original context. We have seen that *arma virumque* and *conticuere omnes* may both have meaning which is independent of their significance within Virgil's text. In the same way, I will argue, we must understand the other, more elaborate, quotations from the *Aeneid* as having weight in Pompeian street culture which is less about heroic epic and more about daily urban life.

For instance, one noticeable unifying theme amongst the Pompeian graffiti quotations from the *Aeneid*—again, setting aside the first words of books 1 and 2—is a preference for lines which come from speeches in the original text: fourteen of twenty-three total citations are spoken not in Virgil's narrative voice but by one character or another. Moreover, there is a surprisingly high concentration of vocatives, imperatives, and first- or second-person verbs in the Virgilian graffiti, as ten of the twenty-three quotations contain at least one of these grammatical forms which explicitly point to the words as a communication from one individual to another. We might consider this, rather than narrative or thematic importance to Virgil's text, as an explanation for the choice of the particular lines. For example, one line scratched into the wall of the palaestra is *vade, age, nate, vocas Zepirios* ('come now, son, you call the Zephyrs'), a version of *Aeneid* 4.223 (which has *voca* in place of *vocas* and the spelling *Zephyros*). The line opens Jupiter's address to Mercury, when he orders him to retrieve Aeneas from the arms of Dido—the speech as a whole is certainly thematically important, but this particular line seems more significant for its representation of the mechanics of direct address. Similarly, scratched into the plaster of the atrium in House 1. 10. 8 were the words *Entelle heroum*, or the opening of Acestes' reproach at *Aeneid* 5. 389—a phrase which, like *arma virumque*, is meaningless on its own but does offer an unambiguous vocative form. The basilica offers the beginning of Priam's reassuring words to Sinon in book 2 (148) *Quisquis es, amissos hinc iam obliviscere Graios* ('whoever you are, here and now forget the departed Greeks'; see Figure 5.5 for a photograph). And quoted on two different walls in Pompeii is Ascanius' oddly decontextualized remark to Nisus in book 9 (269), *vidisti quo Turnus equo, quibus ibat in armis* ('you saw on what horse, with what arms, Turnus went'). Although it is true there are a number of quotations from the *Aeneid* on Pompeian walls which do not contain

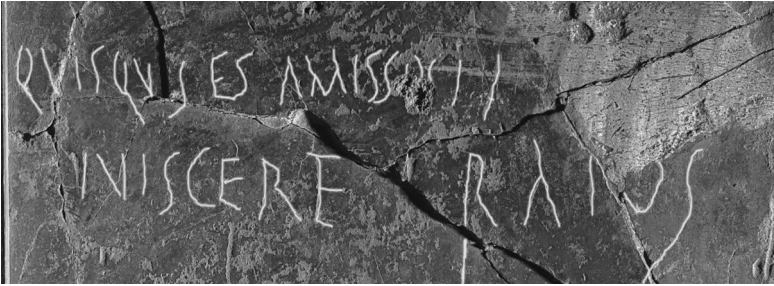


Figure 5.5. Plaster fragment preserving CIL 4. 1841. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. Photograph by Luciano Pedicini.

internal evidence that they were spoken from one character to another, it is nonetheless suggestive that so many contain internal grammatical evidence that they were originally spoken from one individual to another.

Given these parallel examples, we might then wish to revisit the traditional understanding of other instances which, on the surface, seem to point to greater narrative or ‘literary’ understanding—thus, for example, a line from Nisus’ prayer to the moon in book 9 was found scratched on a wall outside a cookshop in Pompeii’s Regio 7: *tu Dea, tu pr(a)ese(ns), nostro succurre labor(i)* (‘you, goddess, be present, assist (us) in our work’). Della Corte sees it in its graffiti form as an invocation of the goddess to look after the shop’s business, which is by no means impossible. Yet it is worth noting that it, like the other quotations already given, represents a vividly spoken moment in Virgil’s text, a point which is emphasized by the fact that the line contains both a vocative and an imperative. Of course, I would by no means dismiss the idea that a line from the *Aeneid* learned in another context might be reused here for a different, more local, purpose. But I would still like to emphasize the ways in which this quotation fits with the others in prioritizing a moment when the sober, factual, narrative voice of Virgil’s text recedes and a character engages in direct discourse. In this sense, Nisus’ prayer from book 9 may have been less significant for an ancient Pompeian as a prayer than as a moment of emotionally-charged communicative speech.

The idea that the fragments of the *Aeneid* found on Pompeian walls may attest a particular interest in communication is borne out by one further example. This is a line which was found scratched into the

plaster of a room off the peristyle in the House of Maius Castricius,⁵⁴ book 1, lines 242 and part of 243: *Antenor potuit mediis elapsus Achivis | Illiricos penetrare sinus* ('Antenor, having escaped from among the Greeks, was able to make his way into the Illyrian bays'). As before, the line itself does not, on the surface, seem spectacularly significant for understanding the *Aeneid*, nor do its meter or grammar seem particularly worthy of note. This line, however, is one significant exception to the rule that the Pompeian quotations are not those of particular interest to the late antique grammarians. In fact, book 1 line 242 shows up repeatedly, in Donatus, Diomedes, Charisius, and others. There is, moreover, universal agreement about its role as a paradigm: it represents an example of *adhortatio* or encouragement, so that Antenor's unlikely escape from the Greeks and ultimate success in Italy may be used to buck the spirits of someone else faced with a difficult situation.⁵⁵ Indeed, Marius Plotius Sacerdos (*Art. Gram.* 1. 180) uses it as an example of something 'not brought up except either by people asking for something or (in response) to people asking for something' (*non inducitur nisi aut a petentibus aut ad petentes, ut 'Antenor potuit' . . .*).

In this sense, the quotation from the House of Maius Castricius is an exception which proves the rule: although it contains no second-person verbs or other deictic words, the later educational treatises understand it primarily as an example of a particular kind of direct address. In its original textual context, moreover, it is found (like the other quotations cited) in a speech: in addressing Jupiter, Venus uses the contrasting example of Antenor to point out that Aeneas is at least as deserving of rescue. It is perhaps curious that, there, it is not actually used in the manner later recommended by the grammarians: although Venus certainly wants Jupiter to do something, the example of Antenor is brought up as a kind of negative example, to show how

⁵⁴ Giordano (1966) 73–89 and Solin (1975) 243–66. For an overall analysis of the many graffiti fragments recovered from this house, and their relationship to the space of the dwelling, see Benefiel (2010) 59–101. The location which I give here is that provided by Solin (1975) 263, although Benefiel (2010) 97–8 hypothesizes a different original find spot. Unfortunately, the inscriptions I discuss here were lost soon after excavation, so we may never know the truth.

⁵⁵ Charisius, *Art. Gram.* 4. 277; Diomedes *Art. Gram.* 2. 464; Donatus *Ars Gram.* 3. 6. 402 and *Aen.* 1. 245–50; Marius Plotius Sacerdos, *Art. Gram.* 1. 166 and 180; Iulianus Toletanus, *Art. Gram.* 2. 19. 109; Marius Victorinus, *Explanationes in Ciceronis rhetoricam* 1. 30.

much greater have been the sufferings of Aeneas. Such ‘misreadings’ are common in the grammarians, but if we may transpose their interpretations back to the Pompeian graffito, it should again give us some pause in seeing the ‘Antenor’ quotation as evidence of knowledge about the *Aeneid* generally as a text. Instead, perhaps like many of the other lines from the *Aeneid* found in Pompeii, its significance lies in its role as a means of communication from one person to another.

In fact, the particular context of the Antenor graffito from the House of Maius Castricius adds, I would argue, another layer to our understanding of the *Aeneid*’s role in the ‘literate landscape’ of Roman Pompeii. The Virgilian line was actually found written beneath two other fragments apparently in the same hand:⁵⁶ the first reads, *Secundus Onesimo fratri suo p[lu]rimam perpetuamque salutem* (‘Secundus (gives) the most and eternal salutations to his brother Onesimus’); second, and immediately above the quotation from the *Aeneid*, *occasionem nactus non praetermisi tibi scribendi ut scires me recte valere* (‘Having obtained the opportunity of writing, I have not let it go by in order that you should know that I am very well’). In other words, the Antenor quotation appeared along with fragments of text which are clearly from a personal letter—although, I would say, probably not an actual letter but one written for practice, since elsewhere on the same wall we also have written *Onesimus Secundo fratri suo, Secundo plurimam amabiliter salutem*, and further repetitions of the phrase *occasionem nactus*. We may add to this the further information that one of the quotations of *Aeneid* 9. 269 elsewhere in Pompeii (*vidisti quo Turnus equo.*) appears along with a letter salutation: *CIL* 4. 1237 opens *Primigenius . . . Mystes communi suo salute (m)* (‘Primigenius gives greeting to his colleague Mystes’). Both salutation and quotation are badly mangled, but the pairing here, as in the House of Maius Castricius, is suggestive.

It may be argued that the connection in these cases between the graffitied *Aeneid* quotations and letter fragments is merely coincidental, or at least may simply be traced to the fact that these happened to be two of the most important subjects learned in school: how to write a letter and how to quote from Virgil. But I would suggest that

⁵⁶ See Giordano (1966) nos. 9–11 for line drawings of the original texts. Unfortunately, although other fragments from the space have been preserved in Pompeii’s antiquarium, these particular texts have been lost.

we should also recognize a connection with the preference seen in the Virgilian quotations for lines which emphasize the act of communication—on a narrative level, by focusing on lines which were originally delivered by characters in speeches, and grammatically, through vocatives, imperatives, and first- and second-person verbs. As I discussed in Chapter 3, letter writing is significant because it puts the emphasis on literacy as a social practice, a means of articulating and reinforcing relationships through the creation of a written document. This is also, in a slightly different way, what is being performed in the quotations from Virgil's *Aeneid* in the Pompeian graffiti, as the great canonical text is mined for fragments which mimic the forms of spoken communication. Certainly, there are some fragments which do not fit this pattern, perhaps most notably the long quotation found in the palaestra (CIL 4. 8630b) of *Aeneid* 1. 192–3: *nec prius absistit qua[m] septe(m) ingentia victor | corpora funda(t) hum(i)* ('nor did he cease before he laid seven huge bodies on the ground'). The line is neither from a speech in the original text nor does it contain any of the grammatical forms which signal communication which I noted earlier; it is, however, particularly appropriate to its material context (the palaestra, where wrestling matches and other athletic contests took place) which may explain why it is quoted here. This is an example of the kind of 'local' explanations which, like the letters spelling DIDO above the painted quotation of *Aeneid* 1.1 in the programma for Cuspius Pansa, would have been immediately visible to some ancient viewers, but which are all too frequently overlooked in a modern scholarly quest for more global interpretations.

Given the interest which the *Aeneid* quotations show in the communicative moments in the original text, it is worth taking note of the citations from Virgil's other works which appear, or fail to appear, on the walls in Pompeii. As I have already noted, the *Eclogues* were clearly popular: fourteen quotations are found, although I am dubious about two in which one partial word has been taken as a reference to *Eclogue* 8. The *Georgics*, on the other hand, may not be found at all, as the two supposed quotations are simply a reference to *Mater Eleusina*, a standard name for Ceres, and the words are written on the wall in the reverse order from how they are found in *Georgics* 1. The *Eclogue* citations, though, like those to the *Aeneid*, do not seem to have been chosen for their thematic importance. Twice we find fairly extended quotations of 2. 21 (*mille meae Siculis errant in montibus agnae*: 'a thousand of my sheep wander in the Sicilian mountains')

and as many as five references to 2. 56 (*Rusticus es, Corydon; nec munera curat Alexis*: ‘you are boorish, Corydon; nor does Alexis care for your gifts’). Twice we get some version of 3. 1 (*Dic mihi, Damoeta, cuium pecus?*: ‘Tell me, Damoetas, whose is this flock?’) and once each of 5. 72 (*Cantabunt mihi Damoetas et Lyctius Aegon*: ‘Damoetas and Lyctian Aegon will sing to me’) and 7. 44 (*Ite domum pasti, si quis pudor, ite, iuveni*: ‘Go home, my well-fed cattle, if you are obedient, go home!’). Finally, we have the unfortunately unverified⁵⁷ inscription of 8. 70 (*Carminibus Circe socios mutavit Olyxis*: ‘Circe changed the comrades of Odysseus by songs’) outside the building of Eumachia in the forum; the two further instances which I include in Appendix 5.1 are only possible references to the line.

Looking over this apparently rather random conglomeration of quotations, it will be seen that, like the references to the *Aeneid* already discussed, there is a high preponderance of lines which include personal pronouns (*meae, mihi*) and imperatives (*dic, ite*). Indeed, only 8. 70 does not have one of these linguistic markers of speech, and it describes a speech act (*carminibus*). Moreover, all of the lines come from speeches by one character or another in the poems. Of course, this is not entirely surprising, since as a genre, pastoral poetry depended heavily on amoebaeon singing and/or dramatic dialogue.⁵⁸ I do not mean to say that the *Eclogues* lack a literary or even a written sensibility, but it is noteworthy that, like the *Aeneid* passages, these quoted fragments are not only from represented speech acts but almost all contain linguistic indicators that they are such. This observation may lead us towards an explanation for the perhaps puzzling absence of the *Georgics* in Pompeian wall writing: although it is true that Virgil’s didactic text generally seems to have enjoyed less popularity than his other works, there is also the inescapable fact that it contains very few spoken utterances. There is some dialogue in the second half of *Georgics* 4, but the previous three-and-a-half books are entirely in the voice of the poet. The work as a whole thus provides little scope for the exploration of characterization through speech.

This is significant because, I would suggest, we may see in the Pompeian citations of Virgil’s works—especially the *Aeneid*, but the *Eclogues* as well—some evidence of the type of ‘literary literacy’

⁵⁷ It is reported in Wordsworth (1837) 4, but no one else appears to have seen it.

⁵⁸ Coleman (1977) 2–3.

promoted by the educational institutions which we know were operating in the city. That is, once we move beyond *arma virumque* and *conticuere omnes*, which seem to have a certain life of their own, the further fragments point towards a significant interest in the representation of speech. We know that Virgil was popular, and that he enjoyed priority in the ancient classroom. But the *Aeneid* is also very long, and it therefore seems likely that only certain parts were studied—it has been suggested that schoolmasters concentrated almost exclusively on book 1.⁵⁹ The Pompeian evidence does not vitiate this, as almost half of the total quotations from the *Aeneid* come from the first book. Once we get beyond it, however, we see the bias towards speeches even more clearly: ten of fifteen are quotations of quotations in the original text, and of the remaining five, four are the first lines of books (three instances of 7. 1 and one of 8. 1). Roman elite education was focused on the honing of rhetorical skills; reading and writing were important, but the ability to represent oneself well in an oral environment was an indispensable part of what it meant to be an educated man. Rather than seeing the quotations from the *Aeneid* on Pompeian walls as merely the tip of a vast iceberg of knowledge about Virgil—interest in and grasp of the whole story of Aeneas and his founding of the Roman race—I suspect we should view their bias towards the spoken in more prosaic terms, as evidence of interest in the meaning and mechanics of oral communication.

Of course, speaking was also a significant part of one of the other institutions in which Virgil may have played an important role: theatre. The evidence is not really strong until late antiquity, when Augustine would write of Aeneas' descent to the underworld, 'some of you know it from books, many from the theatre' (*pauci nostis in libris, multi in theatris: Serm.* 241. 5). But Tacitus preserves the story which I quoted, that a theatrical audience was awed by the performance of some of the poet's verses (*Dialog.* 13. 2) and Suetonius' life of Nero reports that the Emperor promised to appear on stage in 'Virgil's Turnus' (*proditurum se . . . historionem saltaturumque Vergili Turnum: Nero* 54). Juvenal also attests to the practice of performing Virgil at dinner parties (*Sat.* 11. 180–1) as does Petronius (*Sat.* 68.4), although the clearly elite context of this makes it less attractive as a possible avenue for widespread knowledge of the *Aeneid*. On the

⁵⁹ Marichal (1957) 81–4, at 82.

other hand, there is the curious and revealing fact that, as N. Horsfall has pointed out, clear evidence of direct influence from Virgil's text on Pompeian art is very limited. Although the story of Aeneas is popular, it is by no means necessary to trace this back to knowledge of Virgil's epic poem. Especially in contrast with the wide range of *Aeneid* quotations on Pompeian walls, this suggests that what people knew of Virgil was not, in fact, the stories he told; instead, what was prized, and quoted, were individual pithy passages and lines, whose significance was not narrative or thematic but linguistic or gnomic. The Virgilian fragments are fragments, and were consumed as such, stripped of their original context and given new meaning as part of ancient urban street life.

In other words, long before the production of the cantos and the thorough atomization of Virgil by the third- and fourth-century grammarians, it is clear that Virgil's works had been broken down in the digestive system of Roman popular culture. Pompeians certainly had a 'taste' for the story of Aeneas and the epic poem which told his tale. But the evidence is mixed as to whether a relationship was seen between the two—and, if so, what it was. For Pompeian wall writers, the *Aeneid* is not so much a stable, idealized, cultural product as a means of cultural production; like graffiti generally, Virgilian quotations on Pompeian walls are less facts than acts and are aware of themselves as such. As has been written of 'sampling'—the practice in contemporary music of quoting passages from others' compositions—'it is a longstanding practice for consumers to customize their commodities'.⁶⁰ That Virgil's great epic poem was simply one such commodity in the streets of Pompeii is an important fact to remember as we try to peel away the layers of canonization which had already begun to accrue to the *Aeneid* in antiquity. Moreover, it also allows us to see how canonization itself was a useful tool, in that it could give certain people a kind of common language overtly distinct from the discourse of everyday life. In this sense, therefore, like the Euripides' quotation with which I began, the literary Latin on Pompeian walls speaks less to a specific taste for the canon than a desire, and an ability, to put the canon to work in the ancient urban environment.

⁶⁰ Sanjek (1994) 343–60, at 343.

APPENDIX 5.1: QUOTATIONS FROM VIRGIL
ON POMPEIAN WALLS

Aeneid

1.1: *Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris*

1. *CIL* 4. 1282: *ARMA VIRUM* (perhaps m)

size: 6.5 cm long × 2 cm high

location: 6. 7. 20–1, probably in the peristyle (*CIL* 4.1281 and 1283 came from there, although 1282 is simply listed as being from the same house).

2. *CIL* 4. 2361: *CARMINA | COMMUNEMNE | ARMA • VIRUMQUE CANO TRO*

size: 31 cm long × 13 cm high

location: 9. 1. 4, on the western wall of the *taberna*, to the left of the door as you go in

other notes: Mommsen thinks that this is probably all the same hand, although the letters are somewhat differently formed.

3. *CIL* 4. 3198: *ARMA VIRU*

size: 1.5 cm high

location: the wall of the street between 9. 7. 17 and 18

other notes: Mommsen in *CIL* gives the location as on the eastern side of the Vico di Tesmo between the 4th and 5th door from the Via Diadumenorum (the old name for the Via dell'Abbondanza); Della Corte (1940) 175 n. 23, which gives the location 'IX, VII, lato S. tra gl'ingressi 4 e 5' is misleading.

4. *CIL* 4. 4757: *ARMA VIR*

size: 1 cm high

location: 7. 7. 5 in the peristyle, on the column to the extreme right rear.

5. *CIL* 4. 4832: *[A]RMA VIRUMQUE CANO TROIA(E) QUI PRIMUS AB ORIS*

size: 27 cm long

location: 7. 15. 8, on the rear wall of the atrium, to the left as you go in near the corner of the door.

6. *CIL* 4. 5002: *ARMA VIRUMQUE*

size: 26 cm long

location: 9. 2. 26, on the wall of the atrium, to the right.

7. *CIL* 4. 5337: *ARM VIR*

size: unknown

location: 9. 9. c, on the right post of the door.

8. *CIL* 4. 7131: *ARMA VIRUMQUE | CANO TROIAE Q[ARM*
 size: 1.5 cm high (each line)
 location: 1. 6. 1, on the wall of the street to the left of the door
 other notes: Della Corte (1940) 175 n. 16, which lists the location as 1. 4. 1, is incorrect.
9. *CIL* 4. 8320 e–f: *ARM(A) | . . . QUI PR(IM)US*
 size: (*arm*) 1.9 cm long \times 0.4–0.8 cm high; (*qui primus*) 3.1 cm long \times 0.3–0.22 high
 location: 1. 10. 4, in the peristyle.
10. *CIL* 4. 8416: *ARMA VIRUMQUE CAN | . . . ARM* (written under *-que*);
 size: 12 cm long \times 0.5–1.1 cm high
 location: 1. 11. 1, on the wall of the street to the right of the door.
11. *CIL* 4. 8831: *ARMA VIRUMQUE | QUI P(RIMUS) | [VIRU]MQ(UE)*
VIR(UMQUE);
 size: 18 cm long
 location: 3. 2. 1, on the outside wall to the left (west) of the house.
12. *CIL* 4. 9131: *FULLONES ULULAMQUE CANO, NON ARMA VIRUMQ*
[UE
 size: 29.5 cm long
 location: 9. 13. 5, on the outside wall to the left of the door
13. *CIL* 4. 10055c: *QUI PR(IMUS?) . . . | U*
 size: 10 cm long \times 10 cm high
 location: 1. 12. 16, on the outside wall to the left of the door above a bench
 other notes: the location given by Della Corte in *CIL* (2. 2. 16) is incorrect according to the system of numbering *regiones* and *insulae* currently used.
14. *CIL* 4. 10059: *ARMA VIR(UMQUE)*
 size: 10 cm long \times 6 cm high
 location: 1. 13. 1, on the eastern wall of the atrium
 other notes: the location given by Della Corte in *CIL* (2. 3. 1) is incorrect according to the system of numbering *regiones* and *insulae* currently used.
15. *CIL* 4. 10086a: *ARMA VRIUMQUE*
 size: 24 cm long \times 3 cm high
 location: 2. 1. 10, on the wall of the street to the right of the door
 other notes: the location given by Della Corte in *CIL* (2. 4. 10) is incorrect according to the system of numbering *regiones* and *insulae* currently used.
16. *CIL* 4. 10111a: *CAELUS | [A]RM[A VI]R[UMQUE]*
 size: 14 cm long \times 10 cm high
 location: 2. 3. 3, in the space off the portico to the east.

other notes: below is written CAM (CIL 4. 10111b), which might be interpreted as CAN/O. The location given by Della Corte in CIL (2. 6. 3) is incorrect according to the system of numbering *regiones* and *insulae* currently used.

1.126 *stagna refusa vadis, graviter commotus; et alto*

17. CIL 4. 2066, w. add. pp. 215, 465, 704: (*Moles?*) *multa mihi curae cum [pr]esserit artus,/has ego mancinas, stagna refusa, dabo.*

size: 14.5 cm long × 3 cm high

location: 8. 4. 4, in the hallway which runs along the west side of the *tablinum*, on the left hand wall

other notes: the inscription can be translated as ‘When the weight of cares oppresses my limbs, I use my left hand to let the liberating gushes spurt out’ (Varone (2002) 94). The author has taken the phrase *stagna refusa* from Virgil and redeployed it as part of his own couplet. The supplement of *MOLES* at the beginning is by Bücheler in CLE n. 956.

1. 135 *Quos ego—sed motos praestat componere fluctus.*

18. CIL 4. 4409: *QUOS EGO SED*

size: unknown

location: 5. 5. 3, to the right of the exedra which opens off the back of the peristyle near the right corner

other notes: Della Corte (1940) also includes CIL 4. 8798 (*sever(us): | ego quos/Pompei(i)s*) and 8641 (*QUOS*) as quotations of *Aeneid* 1.135. To my mind, however, there is not enough in these inscriptions to connect them specifically with Virgil’s text.

1. 192–3: *nec prius absistit, quam septem ingentia victor| corpora fundat humi, et numerum cum navibus aequet.*

19. CIL 4. 8630b: *NEC PRIUS | ABSISTIT QUA[M] | SEPTE(M) INGENITIA | VICTOR CORPORA | FUNDA(T) HUM(I)*

size: 8 cm long × 6.5 cm high (overall)

location: the portico of the palaestra (2. 7), on column 62.

1. 234: *Certe hinc Romanos olim, volventibus annis*

20. CIL 4. 5012: *CERTE HINC ROMANOS OLIM | VOLVENTIBUS ANNEIS*

size: first line = 10 cm high, 2nd = 6 cm high

location: 9. 2. 26, in the porticus, on the second pillar from the right.

1. 242–3: *Antenor potuit, mediis elapsus Achivis, | Illyricos penetrare sinus, atque intima tutus*

21. CIL 4. 1531: ANTENOR POTU(IT)

size: 33cm long × 7.5 cm high

location: 6. 14. 43 (not 6. 16 as in Della Corte (1940) 176 n. 33), on the left wall of the *tablinum*, not far above the floor.

22. Giordano (1966), n. 11 (= Solin (1975), n. 11): OCCASIONEM NACTUS NON PRAETERMISI TIBI SCRIBENDI, UT SCIRES ME RECTE VALERE | ANTENOR POTUIT MEDIIS ELAPSUS ACHIVIS ILLIRICOS PENETRARE SINUS, APPULIT(?)

size: unknown. A line drawing appears in Giordano (1966), but the plaster on which the graffito was preserved has been destroyed

location: 6. Ins. Occ. 17 (= House of Maius Castricius), from a room on the second floor (below) down a flight of steps to the west of the portico on the house's southern end.

1.468–9: *hac Phryges, instaret curru cristatus Achilles. | Nec procul hinc Rhesi niveis tentoria velis*

23. CIL 4. 8624b: NEC PHRYGAS | EXTABANT. QUID | AGIT APEX DESTER?

size: 6 cm long × 4.5 cm. high

location: the portico of the palaestra (2. 7), on col. 61

other notes: it is difficult to interpret the text's meaning, and its connection with the *Aeneid* seems a bit tenuous.

24. CIL 4. 8757: I NEC VE(LIS) | VELIS

size: 4.2 cm long by 0.4–1.4 cm high

location: in the portico of the palaestra (2. 7), on col. 105.

2.1 *Conticuere omnes intentique ora tenebant*

25. CIL 4. 1672: CONTICUER(E)

size: 7.5 cm long × 2.5 cm high

location: 7. 2. 35, on one of the eastern columns in the tetrastyle atrium.

26. CIL 4. 2213: CONTIQUERE

size: 16 cm long × 7.5 cm high

location: 7.12.18–20, on the eastern wall to the left of the door as you enter.

27. CIL 4. 3151: CONTI(QUERE)

size: 6 cm long × 8 cm high

location: 9. 2 on the wall of the street between door 16 and the south-eastern corner of the *insula*.

28. *CIL* 4. 3889: *CONTICUERE OMNES | OMN(ES) | INTENTIQU[.]S*

size: 0.6 cm high (each line)

location: 1. 2. 6, on the rear wall of the atrium, to the right as you enter.

29. *CIL* 4. 4036: *CONTI[C]U[E]RE O(MNES)*

size: unknown

location: 5. 1. 18, on the wall to the right of the door

other notes: inscription continues, below and off to the side: *SIQUA/C[.]TIT
QUATIT*.

30. *CIL* 4. 4191: *CONTIQUERE | OMNES*

size: 0.8 cm high

location: 5. 2. i, on a column on the right to the rear of the peristyle.

31. *CIL* 4. 4212: *CONTICU(ERE)*

size: 4.5 cm high

location: 5. 2. i, in the exedra which is in the middle of the back side of the peristyle, on the right wall in the middle.

32. *CIL* 4. 4665: *CONTIQUERE*

size: 6 cm high

location: 6. 15. 9, between two doors on the back wall of the atrium.

33. *CIL* 4. 4675: *CONTIQ(UERE)*

size: 2.2 cm high

location: 6. 15. 16, on the right wall of the *taberna*.

34. *CIL* 4. 4877: *CONT(ICUERE) | CONT(ICUERE)*

size: 7 cm and 6 cm high

location: 8. 2. 20, on the north wall of the entrance.

35. *CIL* 4. 6707: *CONTICUERE OMNES*

size: 35 cm long

location: 5. 3. 9, on the street wall outside.

36. *CIL* 4. 8222: *CON[TI]QUERE OMN(ES)*

size: 41 cm long

location: 1. 8. 17, on the northern wall of the garden

other notes: written in charcoal.

37. *CIL* 4. 8247: *CONTIQ(UERE)*

size: 4 cm long

location: 1. 10. 2, in the ‘Thermopolium Primae’, where there are many inscriptions on the western wall which adjoins House 3.

38. CIL 4. 10096b: *CONTICUEREOM(NES)*

size: 12.7 cm long × 0.5–3.4 cm high

location: 2. 1. 11, on the exterior wall to the right of the door

other notes: found near a number of graffitied caricatures, including a gladiator and a bird. The location given by Della Corte in CIL (2. 4. 11) is incorrect according to the system of numbering *regiones* and *insulae* currently used.

2.14: *ductores Danaum tot iam labentibus annis*

39. CIL 4. 5020: *DUCTORES DANAU(M)*

size: unknown

location: 9. 2. 26, in the porticus which is in front of the garden, on the second pillar from the right.

2. 148: *quisquis es, amissos hinc iam obliuiscere Graios*

40. CIL 4. 1841: *QUISQUIS ES, AMISSOS HIN[C IAM OB] | LIVISCERE GRAIOS | SCRIBIT NARCISS | ER*

size: 31. 5 cm long × 24 cm high

location: basilica.

2. 324: *uenit summa dies et ineluctabile tempus*

41. CIL 4. 1251, w. add. p. 206: *VENIT SUMMA (DIES)*

size: 4 cm long

location: 6. 5. 19, on the left post of the entrance to the house

other notes: the words above are followed by a number of uninterpretable letters/words.

3. 286: *aere cauo clipeum, magni gestamen Abantis*

42. CIL 4. 1069a: *BARBARUS AERE CAVO TUBICEN D[E]DIT [HORRIDA SI]GNA*

size: unknown

location: 9. 1. 22, in the *tablinum* which is between the two peristyles, on the left wall in the lower margin of a picture representing Hesione being freed from the rock (by Hercules).

other notes: the supplements at the end of the line are suggested by Bücheler, CLE n. 350. Like no. 30, the Virgilian phrase has been inserted into an 'independent' composition.

4. 223: *uade age, nate, uoca Zephyros et labere pennis*

43. CIL 4. 8768: *VADE | AGE NATE | VOCAS ZE | PIRIOS*

size: 5.2 cm long × 0.8–0.3 cm high (each line)
 location: portico of the palaestra (2. 7), col 106.

5. 389: *Entelle, heroum quondam fortissime frustra*

44. CIL 4. 8379: ENTELLE HEROUM

size: 11.1 cm long × 0.5–6.6 cm high

location: 1. 10. 8, in the atrium, on the pillar to the right as you go into the *cubiculum/tablinum*.

6.119: *si potuit manis accersere coniugis Orpheus*

45. CIL 4. 3183: SI POTUIT

size: 16 cm long × 8 cm high

location: 9. 1. 22, on the wall of the fauces to the left

other notes: again, it is not clear to me that there is enough of this inscription to see a direct quotation of Virgil.

6. 823: *uincet amor patriae laudumque immensa cupido*

46. CIL 4. 3681: VINCET AMU

size: unknown

location: 9. 3. 18–19, on the wall of the street between the two doors

other notes: unusually, done in white paint rather than scratched, and thus probably to be connected with the surrounding programmata.

7. 1: *Tu quoque litoribus nostris, Aeneia nutrix*

47. CIL 4. 3796: AENEIA NUTRIX

size: 1.4 cm high

location: 9. 9. g, on the outside wall to the right of the door

other notes: this house is known as ‘the house of Aemelius Celer’ (a well-known sign painter) on the basis of a painted inscription which reads *Aemelius Celer hic habitat* (CIL 4. 3794). The words above were also painted, in black, along with the name Aemelius Celer (CIL 4. 3790, 3792).

48. CIL 4. 4127: AENEIA

size: 2.5 cm high

location: 5. 2. 10, on the right wall of the atrium.

49. CIL 4. 4373: AAAENEIA

size: 3.5 cm high

location: 5. 5. 3, on a column in the peristyle (fourth on the right side, from the south).

8. 1: *ut belli signum Laurenti Turnus ab arce*

50. CIL 4. 10190:]BILE SIGNUM LAURENTIS RU[

size: 48 cm long × 4–8 cm high

location: 1. 15. 3?

other notes: identified by W. D. Lebek in 'CIL IV. 10190 = Verg. Aen. 8.1?', *ZPE* 57 (1984) 72. The location given by Della Corte in CIL (2. 15. 3) is incorrect according to the system of numbering *regiones* and *insulae* currently used.

9. 269: *uidisti, quo Turnus equo, quibus ibat in armis*51. CIL 4. 1237 w. add. p. 205: PRIMI[G]ENIUS...MYSTIIS COMMUNI
SUO SALUTE VIDISTI QUO TURNUM AEQUORIBUS EIBAT IN ARM
[IS] | SOES...VIRTUTIS MERCES PALMAM PRETIUM GLORIAE
VICTORIAE SPEM CAUSASCI

size: 54 cm long × 3 cm high

location: 6. 1. 24, on the street wall to the left of the door.

other notes: it is not clear what connection the second line has to the first, although Zangemeister in CIL thinks it may be *senarii*. He suspects the author was a schoolboy.

52. CIL 4. 8292: VIDISTIQUO TURNUS EQUO Q[

size: 20 cm long

location: 1. 10. 4, among the *tituli* to the right of the door.9. 404: *tu, dea, tu praesens nostro succurre labori,*

53. CIL 4. 2310k: TU DEA TU PRESENOS TRO SUCCURRE LABORE;

size: unknown

location: 7. 3. 24, on the street between the house door and the south-east corner of the *insula*.

*Eclogues*2. 21: *mille meae Siculis errant in montibus agnae*

54. CIL 4. 8625c: MILLE MEAE | SICULIS ERRANT

size: 6 cm long × 0.4–1.6 cm high

location: the portico of the palaestra (2. 7), col. 62.

55. Giordano and Casale (1990) 293 n. 71: SEVERUS | MILLE MEAE
SICULIS ERRANT IN MONTIBUS AG

size: unknown ('caratteri minuti')

location: 1. 15. 3, in the atrium.

2. 56: *Rusticus es, Corydon; nec munera curat Alexis*

56. *CIL* 4. 1527: *RUSTICUS EST CORYDO[N]*

size: 7 cm long × 2 cm high

location: 6. 14. 12, in the atrium.

57. *CIL* 4. 1524: *RUSTICUS*

size: unknown

location: 6. 14. 12, in the atrium.

58. *CIL* 4. 9208: *RUSTICUS*

size: 23 cm long × 3.1–7.3 cm high

location: Villa of the Mysteries, on the far wall to the left of the door through which you enter the tetrastyle atrium.

59. *CIL* 4. 4660: *CORUSTICUS*

size: 4 cm long × 4 cm high

location: 6. 15. 9, on the right wall of the door.

60. *CIL* 4. 8801: *CORI | DON*

size: 5 cm long × 1.9–4.3 cm high

location: portico of the palaestra (2. 7), col. 110.

3. 1: *Dic mihi, Damoeta, cuium pecus? An Meliboei?*

61. *CIL* 4. 5007: *DET MIHI DAMOETA FELICIOR QUAM PHASIPHAE
HAEC OMNIA SCRIPSIT ZOSIMUS*

size: 35 cm long

location: 9. 2. 26, in the porticus which is before the garden, on the second pillar from the right.

62. *CIL* 4. 9987: *D]IC MIHI | DAM]OET[A*

size: 20 cm long × 4 cm high (each line)

location: 1. 6. 12, on outside of the northern wall.

5. 72: *Cantabunt mihi Damoetas et Lyctius Aegon*

63. *CIL* 4. 5194: *CANTABUNT MIHI*

size: 21 cm long

location: 9. 6. g, on the back wall of the peristyle, to the left of the second doorway from the west.

7. 44: *Ite domum pasti, si quis pudor, ite, iuueni*

64. *CIL* 4. 8701: *SI PUDOR QUIS*

size: 3.5 cm long × 0.3–1.5 cm high

location: the portico of the palaestra (2. 7), col. 83.

8. 70: *Carminibus Circe socios mutavit Ulixi*65. *CIL* 4. 1982: *CARMINIBUS | CIRCE SOCIOS | MUTAVIT | OLYXIS*

size: unknown

location: on the outside of the north wall of the Chalcidicum of Eumachia (7. 9. 1), opposite 7. 9. 62–6.

other notes: the line drawing provided in *CIL* is from Wordsworth 1837 and is certainly not to scale.66. *CIL* 4. 4401: *CARMIN[*

size: unknown

location: 5. 5. 3, on the sixth column on the left side in the peristyle

other notes: In both nos. 66 and 67, I am doubtful that there is enough inscribed to be sure of a quotation from Virgil.

67. *CIL* 4. 5304: *CARM[*

size: 1.2 cm high

location: 9.9. d–e, on the wall of the street at an equal distance between the doors

other notes: see no. 63.

Georgics*1.163 tardaue Eleusinae matris uoluentia plaustra*68. *CIL* 4. 8560: *MATRIS ELEUSINAE*

size: 16.5 cm long × 2.25 high

location: the portico of the palaestra (2. 7), col. 17

other notes: I am doubtful that we should see this as an allusion to the *Georgics*, as the epitaph may have become standard, and the words appear here in the reverse order from the way they are used in Virgil's text.69. *CIL* 4. 8610: *MATRIS HELEUSINAE*

size: 5.2 cm long × 0.5–1.2 cm high

location: the portico of the palaestra (2. 7), col. 33

other notes: see no. 66.

Conclusion

In his treatise ‘On Being a Busybody’, the philosopher and cultural critic Plutarch explicitly recommends against reading graffiti. His fundamental point is that contemporary urban culture is full of distractions and seductions, which lure us away from self-control and convince us to turn our attention to things unworthy of our notice. He illustrates this phenomenon with funerary inscriptions and street graffiti, though he acknowledges that these are ‘the most minor and unimportant’ of the examples he could cite (520E). Nevertheless, he says,

Τί γὰρ χαλεπὸν ἔστιν ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς τὰς ἐπὶ τῶν τάφων ἐπιγραφὰς μὴ ἀναγινώσκειν, ἢ τί δυσχερὲς ἐν τοῖς περιπάτοις τὰ κατὰ τῶν τοίχων γράμματα τῇ ὄψει παρατρέχειν, ὑποβάλλοντας αὐτοῖς ὅτι χρησιμὸν οὐθὲν οὐδ’ ἐπιτερεπὲς ἐν τούτοις γέγραπται· ἀλλ’ “ἐμνήσθη” ὁ δεῖνα τοῦ δεινὸς “ἐπ’ ἀγαθῷ” καὶ “φίλων ἄριστος” ὅδε τις, καὶ πολλὰ τοιαύτης γέμοντα φλυαρίας; ἃ δοκεῖ μὲν οὐ βλέπτειν ἀναγινωσκόμενα, βλέπτει δὲ λεληθότως τῷ μελέτην παρεμποιεῖν τοῦ ζητεῖν τὰ μὴ προσήκοντα.

For what is difficult in not noticing the inscriptions on tombstones along the roadways, or what is vexatious about passing over with your eye as you wander about those writings on the walls, as we suggest to ourselves that there is nothing written in them which is either useful or pleasing – only so-and-so ‘remembers’ so-and-so, and ‘wishes him the best’, and is ‘the best of his friends’, and many things full of such ridiculousness? Giving attention to such things may not seem to hurt, but the harm comes from creating the desire to search out things which are not your business.

The passage has earned Plutarch some opprobrium from scholars, as they note that he does not seem to follow his own advice, and freely uses evidence from graffiti in the parallel lives and elsewhere in his work. It is clear, however, what Plutarch says here about inscriptions is closely akin to the distrust accorded reading generally in his treatise on busybodies, as the reader is exhorted not to give her attention to inappropriate words: Bellerophon is praised for not breaking the seal on the king’s letter in 519E; scholars are castigated for paying undue attention to the infelicitous passages in Homer and the tragedians

(520B); people are urged not to pry into someone else's personal letters (522E). All of these examples seem to support Plutarch's overall point that one should not make public things which ought to be hidden or private, something which the text more famously underscores through the negative image of the person who bursts into households without knocking, or peeks through open doorways as he walks down the street.

In contrast with the more clearly private writings like personal correspondence, however, the sepulchral and graffitied inscriptions stand out. They are, after all, texts which are produced in order that strangers should read them, and to this end they are located, as Plutarch himself notes, in public space (one reads them 'in the roadways' and 'while wandering about'). To put them together with private correspondence, therefore, is to suggest that the personal nature of the sentiments they express disrupts their role as legitimate public texts; because they give individual ideas and emotions a place in the urban landscape, they are dangerous and must be avoided. It is worth noting, however, that Plutarch comes out against graffiti and funerary inscriptions not just because they offer the reader nothing useful but because they represent 'drivel' or 'nonsense' (*φλυνάριος*). This word is commonly used in Plato and signifies in particular the mundane as opposed to the transcendent (see e.g. *Symp.* 211e, *Gorg.* 490c). Plutarch here is thus not simply rejecting the inscriptions he discusses as inappropriate, but as unlovely, trivial, and prosaic. As alluring as they may be, then, it is the wise man's task to reject the invitation into someone else's private business and turn his eyes away.

By way of comparison with this representation of ancient graffiti, we might consider the role which casual inscription plays in the first poem of the *Eclogues* of Plutarch's near-contemporary Calpurnius Siculus.¹ Calpurnius is clearly indebted to Virgil, something which is evident in the recurring character Corydon, who stars in the first, middle, and last poems in his book and whose story clearly represents one of the major themes of the collection. In poem 1, Corydon and his brother Ornytus—both shepherds almost comically embedded in their pastoral world²—take refuge from the sun in a grove sacred to

¹ The date of Calpurnius' writing is much debated, between those who would see him as late antique and those who place him in the reign of Nero. As B. Baldwin puts it in his admirable summary of the controversy, 'Calpurnius is full of Neronian detail but in a diction which puts him in a later period': (1995) 157–67, at 158. It seems to

Faunus, where they discover evidence that someone has been there before them. ‘But what writing has been carved on the sacred beech | which just now was written by some hasty sickle?’ Ornytus questions. ‘Do you see how even now the letters preserve their | green edges and not yet have opened themselves in dry splits?’³ Indeed, it transpires that it is Faunus himself who has written on the tree, a text which consists of a fifty-five-line poem predicting a coming Golden Age which will bring recent civil conflicts to an end, repair relations between the imperial house and the Senate, and improve the state of the Roman Empire. The echo of Virgil’s *Eclogue* 4 is clear, but Calpurnius has introduced a new element by giving his prophetic poem an internal audience: Ornytus and Corydon respond with ‘alarm mixed with joy’ (*inter gaudia terror*) to the world of war, social conflict, and politics represented in the god’s inscription. It is this world, however, which will go on to seduce Corydon, so that by the final *Eclogue* in Calpurnius’ collection he is bored, embarrassed, and irritated by the pastoral culture he celebrated in the opening lines of poem 1.⁴

Thus, Faunus’ graffiti in Calpurnius’ first *Eclogue* introduces in dramatic fashion the values and concerns of the world beyond the countryside and inaugurates the central conflict of the collection as a whole, which charts Corydon’s gradual disillusionment with his native pastoral world. Yet scholars who have turned their attention to Calpurnius have been puzzled, not so much by the god’s message as by its medium: exactly why, let alone how, even a god would have inscribed the fifty-five-line poem onto a tree is not clear. Of course, as I discussed in the Introduction, writing on trees was something of a bucolic commonplace.⁵ In Callimachus, Virgil, Propertius, and Ovid, the poet-lover wanders the countryside, carving onto living bark verses to express longing for his absent beloved. There, as Gallus remarks in *Eclogue* 10, ‘[the trees] will grow, and you, my loving verses, will grow’ (*crescent illae [sc. arbores], crescetis, amores*: 54). On

me that the majority opinion is with the Neronian date, but my argument here does not depend heavily on chronology.

² Leach (1975) 122–48.

³ ‘*Sed quae nam sacra descripta est pagina fago, | quam modo nescio quis properanti falce notavit? | Aspicias ut virides etiam nunc littera rimas | servet et arenti nondum se laxet hiatu?*’ (20–3).

⁴ See Newlands (1987) 218–31.

one level, then, Faunus' graffiti poem is perfectly in keeping with the bucolic world in which it appears, as its textual medium is actually an organic part of the landscape. At the same time, however, unlike Gallus' inscribed *amores*, the content of the prophecy in Calpurnius' first *Eclogue* does not fit neatly into the pastoral poetic world of shepherds, sheep, trees, and mountains (as Corydon remarks, *nihil armentale resultat, | non montana sacros distinguunt iubila versus*). Instead, with its descriptions of war, social conflict, and political machinations, the text represents an intrusion into that world—a breath of the city which challenges and ultimately disrupts the naive isolation which has hitherto protected its shepherd audience.

There are both considerable differences and similarities between the representation of graffiti in Plutarch and Calpurnius. On the one hand, Plutarch's main objection to the wall texts is their abiding worldliness: they entirely lack the aspirations to transcendence which characterize other types of writing to which the wise man should turn his attention. Calpurnius, by contrast, not only makes his graffiti an extended poetic composition, he elevates it further by attributing it to the hand of a god. Both authors, though, see wall inscriptions as having a particular connection with the city and its interests: Plutarch notes that the busybody shuns the country in part because it lacks the opportunities to pry which the city provides through such phenomena as graffiti; Calpurnius is certainly drawing on the traditional location of inscriptions within the pastoral landscape, but also understands such texts as speaking mostly clearly of urban life. Perhaps more curious, however, is the fact that both authors also see graffiti as seductive and dangerous. In each instance, these informal inscriptions represent the means by which an 'other' voice makes itself heard, threatening to disrupt the stability of the world of the text. In this sense, they reflect the same fear and distrust which has long animated debates around graffiti in the modern urban environment. Yet whereas in the modern day, whatever opprobrium is accorded to such informal street texts attaches to the writer—today it is the act of creating graffiti which is criminalized—both of the ancient authors put the onus on the reader: it is the effect and not the fact of the inscriptions which causes them concern. In part, I would argue, this is because of the general sense which I described in Chapter 1 that ancient

⁵ Pace P. J. Davis, who writes of Faunus' graffiti, 'inscriptions carved on trees are indeed unusual even in the world of shepherds': (1988) 32–54.

Roman public space could be legitimately occupied by texts which originated from both civic authority and private citizens. For both Plutarch and Calpurnius, though, it is how an individual engages with that environment which becomes an index of who he is and where he should be situated in the Roman social hierarchy.

Whatever their reasoning, however, it will be noted that neither Plutarch nor Calpurnius actually reflect what has been found on ancient Pompeian walls. Certainly, the idea of short, banal phrases endlessly repeated—as in Plutarch—describes some of the inscriptions, while there are also some longer, more ambitious attempts at poetry to be seen. In truth, though, what these two authors mostly seem to show is how mysterious ancient graffiti writings seemed even to those alive and writing at the time. It is tempting to blame historical distance for our inability to determine definitively the goals, ideals, social identities, educational backgrounds, and political investments of those who inscribed the walls in Pompeii before its destruction. But the fact of the matter is that, even as the impulse to create graffiti seems on some level to be a universal human one, inscrutability is almost inevitably one of its effects—indeed, it often seems to be an effect for which the authors strive. This, of course, contrasts with the types of writing in public space whose goal is to admonish, instruct, or inform: price lists, building labels, announcements of prohibitions and permissions, and so on, which must be considered unsuccessful if they fail to communicate their message clearly. Graffiti actively eschew this objective of easy interpretability, which exacerbates the ‘category-confusion’ they tend to generate in viewers’ minds. In the modern day, this refusal of interpretability often comes by way of a refusal, or manipulation, of the most basic building blocks of writing, namely letter forms: thus, Roger Rosenblatt wrote in the 1980s, ‘Most of the graffiti on the subways nowadays is indecipherable, which either means that the attack artist is an illiterate—frightening in itself—or that he is using some unknown cuneiform language or the jagged symbols of the mad.’⁶ Plutarch and Calpurnius do not complain that the ancient wall writings to which they refer cannot be read; they see the texts as threatening even though, in fact precisely because, they are legible. In this sense, the two ancient authors reflect the danger represented by graffiti in a world where the written word was, by and large, owned by a small

⁶ Quoted in Cresswell (1996) 42.

percentage of the population and only found in places where it could be contained and controlled.

In this book, I have described how and why Pompeian graffiti use the forms, language, themes, motifs, styles, and sentiments which we are accustomed to associate with 'high' literary culture. The combination of such elements with the 'low' form of graffiti writing has historically been one of the things which puzzled scholars about the Pompeian texts and which has led inexorably to certain suppositions about the identities of Pompeian writers: thus, for example, the prevalent idea that they must have been 'schoolboys', a designation which allows them access to elite literary forms (through education) but still sees them as marginal in the Roman social hierarchy (because of their age). But as I hope I have suggested in the previous chapters, we need to interrogate our assumptions about what constitutes high and low cultural forms. It is possible that, because of the barriers to literacy which existed in Graeco-Roman antiquity, we cannot classify any written form as genuinely popular in the way that we would speak of popular textual genres today. At the same time, however, I think that it is important to recognize the ways in which the graffiti represent voices which speak from outside the spaces which produced canonical Roman literature while simultaneously showing a great deal of familiarity with the language used there. There were people who wrote on Pompeian walls who understood, in general terms, the form of the elegiac couplet; who knew their *Aeneid*, at least parts of it; who could distinguish, and to a certain extent replicate, the erotic sentiments of Ovid and Propertius; who could recognize a letter salutation and at least some of the standard genres of the personal epistle. I would not want these facts to lead us to reclassify Pompeian graffiti as 'real' literature in the same way that some New York gallery owners tried to rescue urban graffiti in the 1970s by reclassifying it as 'real' art. Rather, I would like to emphasize the fact that these texts give us the opportunity to interrogate and reassess where we draw the boundaries of literary study in classics, as well as to draw a new and perhaps more comprehensive map of the cultural practices which gave meaning to the lives of the inhabitants of Roman Pompeii.

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Index of Sources

Note: Page numbers in *italics* indicate illustrations.

Appendix Virgiliana

Copa

1–35: 90–1

Aristophanes

Acharnians

143–4: 21

Wasps

98–9: 21

Aristotle

Poet.

1448b: 140

Rhetoric

1405b4–6: 29n70

Sophistical Refutations

1.4: 253

Augustine

Serm.

241.5: 261

Aulus Gellius

NA

1.24: 61

3.11: 61n47

15.4.3: 97–8

Callimachus

Aet.

fr. 73: 22

Calpurnius Siculus

Eclogues

1.20–3: 275

10.54: 276

Catullus

4: 63

15.18: 123n59

37.10: 20, 79

70.3–4: 215

85: 28

101: 62–3

101.4: 130

Cicero

ad Att.

6.1.17: 50

13.21a.1–2: 138

ad Fam.

9.10.1–2: 162

12.16.17: 163

16.16.2: 170

de Div.

2.111: 148

de Leg.

2.59: 50

de Nat. Deo.

2.69: 130n74, 189n105

3.62: 130n74

de Off.

3.2: 123n58

de Oratore

2.59.240: 97n1, 99, 245n31

2.266: 47n10

de Senec.

73: 28n68

Phillipics

12.2: 122n57

pro Murena

27: 215n39

pro Sest.

102: 176

Tusc. Disp.

1.34, 117: 28n68

Verr.

2.3.77: 98, 100n10

2.4.31.69: 51

2.5.162: 122–3, 247n34

CIL

2.415: 73n84

2.558: 73n84

2.1752: 73n84

2.3186: 73n84

2.5241: 73

2.5975: 73n84

3.1635,4: 173

3.1966: 55n32

4.138: 52

4.279: 108

4.346: 105

4.427: 105

4.528: 105

4.674: 18

4.697: 121

4.733: 235–6

4.768: 107

CII (cont.)

- 4.806-7: 80n101
 4.808: 121
 4.813: 58
 4.935i: 106-7
 4.1059: 102
 4.1069a: 268
 4.1096: 120n51
 4.1105: 163
 4.1111: 223n49
 4.1136: 52
 4.1227: 182-4, 183
 4.1234: 241
 4.1237: 258, 270
 4.1241: 163
 4.1251: 268
 4.1261: 122-4, 247
 4.1275: 163
 4.1282: 263
 4.1291: 86n117
 4.1292: 87n117
 4.1292: 87n117
 4.1324: 247
 4.1410: 220n44
 4.1520: vii-ix, 92, 92-3, 150, 207n30,
 208, 240n24, 247
 4.1523: 92n128, 207n30
 4.1524: 260, 271
 4.1526: 92n128, 207n30
 4.1527: 260, 271
 4.1528: 92n128, 207n30
 4.1531: 266
 4.1544: 17n34
 4.1552-6: 17
 4.1553-4: 17n34
 4.1555: 17n34
 4.1556: 17n34
 4.1593: 168
 4.1595: 26-7, 27
 4.1597: 119-20
 4.1607: 169
 4.1608: 18
 4.1645: 93-5, 94
 4.1649: 94, 94-5
 4.1672: 266
 4.1679: 80, 211
 4.1684.: 169
 4.1698: 182
 4.1781: 191
 4.1811: 177
 4.1812: 191
 4.1824: 185, 185-6
 4.1825: 124, 191
 4.1830: 179
 4.1837: 206
 4.1841: 124, 148, 240n24, 256, 268
 4.1842: 17
 4.1847: 17n34
 4.1852: 163, 167-8, 168
 4.1860: 240
 4.1870: 177
 4.1877: 179
 4.1882: 178
 4.1883: 191
 4.1884: 133n79, 178
 4.1885: 17, 133n79
 4.1893: 247
 4.1893-4: 151-6, 152, 155
 4.1893-8: *pl.* 6
 4.1894: 247
 4.1895: 154, 247
 4.1896: 156
 4.1898: 157
 4.1904: 29-30, 30, 241
 4.1928: 192
 4.1931: 26, 191
 4.1934: 148, 166
 4.1939: 124-6, 125
 4.1943: 119
 4.1982: 260, 272
 4.1997: 120
 4.2015: 169
 4.2018a-c: 166
 4.2066: 220n44, 265
 4.2069: 177
 4.2154: 163
 4.2200: 18, 186n100
 4.2213: 266
 4.2310k: 270
 4.2360: 24, 74, 74-7, 177, 241n28
 4.2361: 240, 263
 4.2374: 166
 4.2395: 18, 148, 240n24
 4.2400a,b: 25n62
 4.2413f: 169
 4.2437: 17n34
 4.2445: 197n16
 4.2450: 17n34
 4.2461: 29-30, 30
 4.2487: 30n73
 4.2950: 161
 4.2993a: 148
 4.2995: 182n94
 4.3040: 92n128, 207n30
 4.3135: 247
 4.3149: 247
 4.3151: 266-7
 4.3183: 269
 4.3198: 263
 4.3199: 186

- 4.3223: 19
 4.3370: 121
 4.3460: 105
 4.3494i: 197n16
 4.3525: 121
 4.3527: 102
 4.3681: 269
 4.3775: 228
 4.3794: 232, 269
 4.3786: 163
 4.3796: 269
 4.3820: 228
 4.3884: 227n58, 244
 4.3889: 267
 4.3905: 80, 163–4, 201n26
 4.4008: 150
 4.4009: 177
 4.4036: 267
 4.4091: 186n100
 4.4100: 164
 4.4102: 164
 4.4103: 164
 4.4106: 164
 4.4109: 164
 4.4114: 8
 4.4118: 164
 4.4120: 164
 4.4126: 26
 4.4127: 269
 4.4182: 17
 4.4191: 267
 4.4200: 186
 4.4212: 267
 4.4225: 26
 4.4235: 25
 4.4239: 240n25
 4.4373: 269
 4.4401: 272
 4.4409: 265
 4.4433: 19
 4.4447: 166
 4.4456: 120, 121, 197n16
 4.4491: 196n13, 247
 4.4509: 220n44
 4.4528: 18
 4.4533: 120
 4.4639: 201n26
 4.4659: 186
 4.4660: 260, 271
 4.4663: 186
 4.4665: 267
 4.4675: 267
 4.4748: 17n34
 4.4752: 163
 4.4753: 163
 4.4757: 263
 4.4832: 263
 4.4838: 163
 4.4877: 267
 4.4925: 148, 240n24
 4.4957: 27–8
 4.4966: *pl.* 3, 143, 223n49
 4.4966–70: *pl.* 4
 4.4966–73: *pl.* 2
 4.4967: 143
 4.4968: 144
 4.4969: 144
 4.4970: 144
 4.4971: 144, 212
 4.4971–3: *pl.* 5
 4.4972: 144
 4.4973: 144
 4.5002: 263
 4.5007: 148, 260, 271
 4.5012: 265
 4.5020: 268
 4.5092: 204–5, 205
 4.5186: 186
 4.5194: 271
 4.5214: 17
 4.5272: 186n100
 4.5296: *pl.* 8, 13n27, 38, 41–2, 196–204,
 198, 206–32, 221
 4.5296–9: *pl.* 7, 221
 4.5299: 222
 4.5304: 272
 4.5337: 263
 4.5350: 163
 4.5370: 177
 4.5373: 161
 4.5380: 80n101
 4.5432: 17
 4.6613: 108
 4.6625: 108
 4.6626: 108, 109, 112–4
 4.6629: 121
 4.6678: 121
 4.6697: 182n94
 4.6707: 267
 4.6755: 201n26
 4.6761: 179n87
 4.6768: 179n87
 4.6782: 186n100
 4.6796: 109n32
 4.6815: 180
 4.6819: 253, 254
 4.6820: 179n87, 254n50
 4.6842: 220n44
 4.6885: 179n87
 4.6893: 127

CIL (cont.)

4.7038: 58
 4.7065: 116–8
 4.7129: 242
 4.7131: 242–3, 264
 4.7201: 108, 114, 115, 245n32
 4.7353: 247
 4.7382: 169
 4.7679: 105n25, 244
 4.7714–16: 66
 4.7716: 55
 4.8114: 182n94
 4.8123: 25n61
 4.8162: 180n88
 4.8177: 163
 4.8203–4: 18
 4.8222: 267
 4.8227: 163
 4.8231: 182n94
 4.8247: 267
 4.8259: 80, 211, 240n24
 4.8270: 201n26
 4.8292: 270
 4.8320e–f: 264
 4.8321: 201n26
 4.8347: 169
 4.8364: 169
 4.8379: 269
 4.8408a–c: 220n44
 4.8416: 264
 4.8491: 18n35
 4.8560: 247n36, 272
 4.8596: 26
 4.8610: 247n36, 272
 4.8623: 25n61
 4.8624b: 266
 4.8625c: 259, 270
 4.8630b: 259, 265
 4.8701: 260, 271
 4.8728–9: 18n35
 4.8757: 266
 4.8768: 268–9
 4.8801: 271
 4.8805: 18n35
 4.8820–63: 18n35
 4.8831: 264
 4.8859–68: 80
 4.8883: 163
 4.8888: 201n26
 4.8891: 182n94
 4.8899: 64–9, 65, 72, 73, 77
 4.8972: 18n35
 4.8989: 17n34
 4.9008: 26
 4.9108–9: 18n35

4.9123: 26, 69–72, 70, 77
 4.9131: 25, 249, 248–51, 264
 4.9171: 180
 4.9202: 186n100
 4.9208: 260, 271
 4.9847: 89–91, 207–8, 247
 4.9848: 89–91, 246n33
 4.9849: 89, 182n94
 4.9850: 81–3, 82
 4.9851: 82
 4.9852: 82n106
 4.9987: 260, 271
 4.9997: 18n35
 4.10012: 18n35
 4.10018: 17n34
 4.10030: 178
 4.10055c: 264
 4.10059: 264
 4.10065a: 182n94
 4.10067: 18n35
 4.10070: 197
 4.10086a: 264
 4.10096b: 268
 4.10111a: 264
 4.10190: 270
 4.10237: 68n70
 4.10241: 68n70, 182
 4.10247: 68n70, 161
 4.10488: 58n39
 4.10634: 177
 4.10640: 182n94
 6.2357: 65
 6.10230: 216n40
 6.12951: 73n84
 6.13740: 55n33
 6.29838b: 56
 6.29942: 68
 6.29943: 68
 6.31615: 53n26
 8.9496: 73n84
 10.928: viii
 11.627: 73n85
 11.3303: 133n79
 14.356: 73n85

CLE

35: 177
 39: 107n27
 41: 120
 231: 125n65
 350: 268
 513: 73n85
 929: 120–1
 931: 80n104
 956: 265

- 1278: 73
 1450: 73n85
 1864: 8
 1931: 179n87
- Dio Cassius**
 39.21.1–2: 50
- Diogenes Laertius**
 6.50: 235n7
- Donatus**
Vit. Virg.
 32, 41: 237
- Euripides**
Antiope
 fr. 199 Nauck: 233
 fr. 200 Nauck: 233
Hippolytos
 496: 223n48
Hippolytos Kalyptomenos
 fr. 430 Nauck: 192n5
- Glaucus of Nicopolis**
Palatine Anthology
 9.341: 22
- Horace**
Ars Poetica
 372–3: 79n98
Epist.
 2.1.71: 194n8
Odes
 3.30.1: 66
 4.1: 192
Sat.
 1.4.71: 79n98
 1.10.74–75: 194n8
- Juvenal**
Sat.
 11.180–1: 261
- Livy**
AUC
 pref. 2–3: 241
 pref. 6: 66
 2.32.8–12: 123
 7.3.5–8: 50
- Lucian**
Dial. Meretr.
 4.3: 201
 5.3: 21
 10.5: 22, 201–2
- Martial**
 1.39: 114–5
 1.53: 138
 1.117.10–12: 79
 5.56: 50
 7.67.16–17: 218
- 10.100.1: 141n14
 12.61.7–10: 240n27
- Nepos, Cornelius**
Vit. Att.
 18.5: 62n48
- Ovid**
Amores
 1.1: 185, 193
 1.1.24: 193n6
 1.1.27: 71–2
 1.8.77–8: 152, 153
 2.1.17–20: 38n96
 2.1.38: 192
 2.16.13–14: 192
 3.1.53–4: 38n96, 39
 3.11: ix
 3.11.35: vii, 89–90, 207
Ars Amatoria
 1.475–6: 154–6
Fasti
 3.535: 176
 4.109–13: 38n96
 5.563–6: 238
Heroides
 3.140: 206
 5.21–2: 22
Metamorphoses
 4.73: 199, 220
 4.74: 221
Tristia
 3.1.11: 72n80
- Persius**
 1.20–1: 74–5
 1.29–30: 194n8
 1.111–14: 56–57
 1.134: 101
- Petronius**
Sat.
 22: 20
 48: 8n16
 58.7: 46n6, 133
 68.4: 261
 71.8: 55n33
- Plato**
Gorg.
 490c: 274
Republic
 479b–c: 29n70
Symp.
 211e: 274
- Plautus**
Curculio
 591–2: 176
Mercator
 409: 38

- Plautus** (*cont.*)
Poen.
 19: 107n26
Rudens
 1249–51: 176
- Pliny the Elder**
NH
 7.36: 110n33
- Pliny the Younger**
Epis.
 2.10.3: 138
 3.17.1: 172n76
 5.17.2: 72n80
 7.36: 110n33
 8.6.14: 50
 8.8.7: 22
- Plutarch**
Brutus
 9.3: 97
Caesar
 62.4: 97
Grac.
 17: 97n1, 100
On Being a Busybody
 519E: 274
 520B: 274
 520E: 273–4, 276–7
 522E: 274
- Polybius**
 1.35.4: 234
- Propertius**
 1.1.4–6: vii–ix, 89, 207
 1.7: 192
 1.9: 192
 1.18.22: 22
 2.5.9–10: 195–6, 196n13
 2.28.8: 215
 2.34.66: 237
 3.3.47–9: 38n96
 4.5.47–8: 152, 153
- Pseudo-Lucian**
Erotes
 16: 21
- Publilius Syrus**
 435: 177
 555: 178n84
 557: 178n84
- Quintilian**
Inst. Orat.
 1.8.6: 195
 1.8.9: 175
 1.8.12: 140
 1.36.2: 195, 248
- 2.4.12–13: 194n8
 5.11.36: 175
 5.11.37: 175, 187
 6.3.38: 47n10
 7.9.8: 253
 10.2.1: 140
- Rhet. ad Her.*
 4.4.8: 176
- Sacerdos, Marius Plotius**
Art. Gram.
 1.166, 180: 257n55
 1.180: 257
- Sappho**
 fr. 2: 223n48
- Seneca the Elder**
Controv.
 1 praef.8: 214n37
 1 praef.10: 175
 1.6.5: 215n39
 7.3.8–9: 175
- Seneca the Younger**
ad Marc.
 1.1: 215n39
de Ira
 2.31: 123n58
Ep. Mor.
 40.1: 170
 75.1: 162
 108.8: 176
- Strabo**
Geography
 674: 97n1
 675: 119, 123
- Suetonius**
Aug.
 53.1: 99n6
 55.1: 100n9, 101n18
 57.2: 101n15
 80.2: 101n17
Calig.
 6.1: 101n15
 8.1: 101n17
Claud.
 16: 119n48
 1.1: 101n17
Dom.
 5: 51
Gramm.
 16: 237
Iul.
 20.2: 101n17
 41: 100n9
 49.4: 101n15

- 51.2: 101n15
 80.3: 100n9
 84.2: 99n6
- Nero**
 39.2: 100, 101n17
 45: 97
 54: 261
- Tib.**
 59.1: 101n17
- Vit.**
 14: 100n9
- Tab. Vind.**
 II.212: 172
 II.225: 172n76
 II.311: 172
 III.670: 172
- Tacitus**
Annals
 3.54: 115n44
Dialog.
 13.1: 239
 13.2: 240, 261
- Terrence**
Adelphi
 572–84: 47n9
- Theocritus**
Idyll
 1: 23
 7: 23
 18.47–8: 22n49
- Tibullus**
 2.6.12–14: 38n96
- Valerius Maximus**
 4.4.7: 110n33
 9.1.3: 215n39
- Varro**
LL
 6.45: 67
- Sat. Men.*
 86.4: 248
- Virgil**
Aeneid
 1.1: 25, 242–52, 251, 259, 263–5
 1.126: 265
 1.135: 265
 1.192–3: 259, 265
 1.234: 265
 1.242–3: 257–8, 266
 1.468–9: 266
 2.1: 251, 266–7
 2.14: 268
 2.148: 268
 2.324: 268
 3.286: 255, 256, 268
 4.223: 255, 268–9
 5.389: 255, 269
 6.119: 269
 6.823: 269
 6.851–3: 254–5
 7.1: 261, 269
 8.1: 261, 270
 9.269: 255, 258, 270
 9.404: 256, 270
 10.652: 215
- Eclogues*
 2.21: 259–60, 270
 2.56: 260, 271
 3: 90
 3.1: 260, 271
 4: 275
 5: 23
 5.13–15: 22, 23
 5.72: 260, 271
 7.44: 260, 271
 8.70: 260, 272
 10.52–4: 22, 23
- Georgics*
 1.163: 259, 272

General Index

Note: page numbers in *italics* indicate illustrations.

- Adams, J. N., 18, 19n41, 172
Aedituus (epigrammist), 146–7
Agrippa Postumus, 127, 131
Allison, Penelope, 128
Aninus Fortunatus, Gnaius, 120
Anna Perenna, feast of, 176
Anyte of Tegea, 61
Aphrodite, Cnidian, 21
Apollo Karneios sanctuary (Thera), 2
Aramaic graffiti, 19n42
Aristophanes, 21, 22, 38
Aristotle, 140, 253
Asinius Pollio, 146
Atticus, T. Pomponius, 61–2
Augustine of Hippo, Saint, 261
Augustus, Roman emperor, 45, 100, 127, 237, 239
Aulus Gellius, 97–8, 100
authorship, 41, 49–60, 56, 59, 137–74
 anonymous, 4, 21, 52, 166
 authenticity and, 170–1, 218
 definitions of, 139–40
 of epigrams, 52, 60–1, 76, 204–6
 female, 200–1
 Foucault on, 139, 141–2, 150, 158, 166
 identity and, 159–74
 of programmata, 147, 160
 pseudonyms and, 166
 ‘signatures’ of, viii, 92, 145, 147, 158–9
Avellino, Francesco Maria, 32–5

Bacchus, 88–91, 93, 95, 128, 130–1
Bagnall, R., 10
Balbus, House of, 73–6, 74
Baldwin, B., 274n1
Barthes, Roland, 139
Barton, Cheryl, 1
Benefiel, R., 10n20
Bentley-Luchs law, 156n43, 178n86
Bergman, Bettina, 86
Biffi, N., 119n47
blanditiae, *see* diminutives
Bologna Papyrus, 170
Bonaventure, Saint, 139
Bourdieu, Pierre, 194
Bowman, A. K., 173n80
Bramble, J. C., 57

Breed, Brian, 23
Brown, Bill, 31
Bücheler, F., 8, 120, 121, 125
 on Publilius Syrus, 177
 on Tiburtinus’ poems, 143n22
bucolic poetry, 22–3, 90–3, 95, 276
Butler, Shane, 10

cacator, cave malum . . . , 54–9, 56, 64–6
Caecilius Iucundus, L., 201n25
Caesar, Gaius Julius, 50, 97, 99, 100
Callimachus (Greek poet), 149
Calpurnius Siculus, 274–8
Calzini Gysens, J., 161n45
carmina communemne, 252
Catullus, Gaius Valerius, 36, 60, 72, 147
 on brother’s death, 62–3
 marriage hymn of, 141
 on unfaithfulness, 215
 use of diminutives by, 214nn36–7
Catulus, Lutatius, 51, 147n28
cave canem mosaic, 45
Celer, Aemelius, 102, 227–8, 232, 244
Centenary, House of the, 229, 231–2
Chateaubriand, François-Auguste-René de, 33–5
Christian graffiti, 2
Cicero, 10, 50, 51, 96, 241
 correspondence of, 162, 165, 170
 on Ennius, 148
 on graffiti, 97
 on plagiarism, 138
 sexually based insults of, 192
CILA.5296
 context of, 218–24
 gendered voice of, 196–204
 location of, 224–32, 226, 227
 meter in, 206–11
 plaster fragment of, 221
 subject matter of, 211–18
 see also Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum
Clarke, John, 84, 87
Clarke, W., 34n86
Clemens, Suedius, 107
Concord, Temple of, 100
Conops, C. Hostilius, 163–4
Conte, G. B., 192n5

- Copa* (pseudo-Virgilian poem), 90–1
 Copley, F. O., 207
 Corbier, M., 78n95
Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum (*CIL*),
 5n7, 14–15, 40
 Courtney, Edward, 8, 66, 89
 on Tiburtinus, 143n22, 146, 147
 Crassus, Marcus Licinius, 99
 Cresces, L. Quintilius, 164, 166
 Criboire, R., 140n11
 Cryptoporticus, House of the, 238
 Cugusi, P., 172–3
 Cuspius Pansa, 108–9, 112–16, 113, 242–5,
 243, 249–52, 259
- Dacia (Roman province), 173
 Daphnis songs, 23
 Darnton, R., 9n17
 Daube, David, 53
 Davis, P. J., 276n5
 Degrassi, A., 249n43
 Della Corte, Matteo, 14, 117, 147, 191n1
 *CIL*4.7129–31 and, 242, 243, 245
 *CIL*4.9123 and, 69–71, 70
 on literary quotations, 247, 250, 256
 on names of houses, 249
 on screech owl, 248
 Derrida, Jacques, 167
 diminutives, 200, 208, 210, 214, 217
 Diogenes Laertius, 235n7
 Diogenes the Cynic, 235
 Diomedes, House of, 160
 Dipylon Gate, 21, 201
 Doctor, House of the, 229
 Domitian, Roman emperor, 51, 229n66
 Donatus, Aelius, 61
 Dunbabin, Katherine, 149, 150
 Dupont, Florence, 176
- earthquake
 of 1980, 13
 of 62 CE, 15, 17–19, 131
 education, 49, 58, 71, 173
 epistolary fragments and, 171n73
 methods of, 193–5
 in poetics, 58, 71, 193–4, 237, 248, 253–5
 popular drama and, 176–7, 181n90
 in rhetoric, 253
 writing materials for, 45, 187–8, 188
 see also literacy
 Egyptian graffiti, 2
 ‘*étuns*’ inscriptions, 18
 ekphrasis, 40, 78–9, 112–14, 135
 elegy, 11, 137
 couplets in, 61–2, 69, 71–2, 143–59
 epic versus, 193
 paraclausithyron and, 38–9
 in Tibullan corpus, 200, 202
 Eliot, T. S., 254n53
 Ennius, Quintus, 148, 176, 195
 epigrams
 definitions of, 60
 ekphrastic, 40, 78–9, 110–14, 135
 epitaphs and, 45, 60–77, 65, 70, 74
 gnomic, 140, 159, 176, 179, 184, 191, 262
 of Martial, 42–3, 60, 64, 96
 panegyric, 113, 114
 Plutarch on, 273–4
 Quintilian on, 140, 175
 Epigrams, House of, 85–7
 epigraphy, 6, 45–7, 51–2, 76–7
 access to originals in, 145–6
 Chateaubriand on, 33–4
 programmata and, 102
 epistolography, 159–69
 conventions in, 168–74
 Hellenistic, 165n52
 epitaphs, 11–12, 200
 Catullus and, 62–3
 epigrams and, 45, 60–77, 65, 70, 74
 epistolary graffiti and, 163–4, 167–8
 of Homer, 61n47
 manuals for, 71n78
 of Martial, 64
 of Mordia, 216n40
eros didaskalos, 192n5
 Euxinus, Caupona of, 81–3, 82, 87–96, 88,
 92, 94
- ‘Fab Five Freddy’ (graffiti artist), 52
 Feldherr, Andrew, 62, 73
 Felix, P. Cornelius, 132–5
 Fiorelli, Giuseppe, 14–15
 Fleming, J., 9
 Foucault, Michel, 139, 141–2, 150, 158, 166
 Franklin, J. L., Jr., 13n26
 Fröhlich, T., 55n34
- Galen, 234
 Gandy, John P., 32
 Garrucci, R., 21n48
 Gell, William, 32
 Germanicus Caesar, 101
 Gibson, R. K., 167
 Gigante, M., 8, 38n94, 149, 192, 203
 Gilleland, M. E., 214n37
 Giordano, Carlo, 171, 200–1
 gladiatorial games
 notices of, 20, 102
 repeal of ban on, 127

- gladiatorial games (*cont.*)
 sponsorship of, 45, 98, 227, 244
- gladiators, 13
 depictions of, 68n70, 268
 school for, 142
- gnomic epigrams, 140, 159, 176, 179, 184, 191, 262
- Golden Cupids, House of the, 253
- Goold, G. P., 202–3, 207
- Gracchus, Gaius, 100n11
- graffiti
 in Aramaic, 19n42
 authorizing power of, 3–4, 49–60
 contexts of, 4–5, 9–11, 52–4, 219–24, 221
 dating of, 15–20
 definitions of, 4–5
 Egyptian, 2
 in Greek, 19–22, 25, 119, 130, 148–9, 222–3, 233–7, 235
 of Herculaneum, 8, 20, 177, 233–7, 235
 Latin terms for, 20, 79
 modern, 1–4, 52, 160–1, 174, 277
 Plutarch on, 273–4
 in Rome, 2, 5
 Safaitic, 19n41, 161n45
 scatological, 53–9, 56, 59, 64–6, 124
 sexual, 8, 26, 70, 79, 103, 124–6, 150, 178, 191–224
 on trees, 21–4, 275–6
 visual images and, 6, 26–7, 27, 40, 56, 59, 77–96
- Grant, M., 91n127
- Gutzwiller, Kathryn, 60–1, 139–40, 150
- Habinek, Thomas, 26–7, 181
- Hadrian, Roman emperor, 173n80
- Hadrian's Wall, 172
- Hallett, Judith, 213
- Hardie, P. R., 63n57
- Harris, William, 5n10, 25n58, 46
 on displaying official texts, 48n13
 on female literacy, 201n25
- Hedrick, C. W., Jr., 236
- Heraclea tablet, 47n12
- Herculaneum, 13
 art of, 34
 graffiti of, 8, 20, 177, 233–7
 Suburban Baths of, 20
- Hesiod, 119n47
- Hic habitat felicitas* plaque, 46
- Hinds, Stephen, 43, 141
- Hirtia Psacas, 80, 163–4
- Hoffman, A., 227
- Holconius Rufus, 177
- Homer, 274
 “epitaph” of, 61n47
 female personae of, 202, 203
 homosexuality, 2, 21, 75, 197–206, 210–218
- Horace, 193–4
 poetic epistles of, 165
 Quintilian on, 195
- Horsfall, N. M., 38n94, 203, 239, 262
- Houses (in Pompeii)
 of Balbus, 73–6, 74
 of the Centenary, 229, 231–2
 of the Cryptoporticus, 238
 of Diomedes, 160
 of the Doctor, 229
 of the Epigrams, 85–7
 of the Golden Cupids, 253
 of Julius Polybius, *pl. 1*, 127–35, 129, 134
 of Maius Castricius, 171–4, 182–4, 200, 257–8
 of Octavius Quarto, 90
 of the Orso Ferito, 80, 81
 of the Scientists, 92
 of the Silver Wedding, 17
 of Siricus, 238
 of the Tragic Poet, 45, 122, 247n34
 of the Triclinium, 87
 of Fabius Ulitremulus, 238n16, 248, 249, 251, 252
- Housman, A. E., 26, 70
- interpuncts, 219
- Isis cult, 147, 160
- Jashemski, Wilhelmina, 87–8, 90–1
- jeux de lettres*, 46n5
- Johnson, Lyndon Baines, 106
- Johnson, William A., 25
- Julia Felix, 52
- Julius Polybius, House of, *pl. 1*, 127–35, 129, 134
- Jupiter Optimus Maximus, 51
- Juvenal, 36, 192, 212, 261
- Kaster, Robert, 109, 115, 253
- Kelin, W., 148n34
- Kell, C., 167n59
- Kellum, B., 78n95
- Kelsey, Francis, 137, 163n49
- Koskenniemi, H., 169n63
- Langner, M., 26n64, 220n45
 ‘*lapidarias litteras*’, 46n6, 133
Laudatio Turiae, 216n40
- Lausberg, M., 28n68
- Lebek, W. D., 171n73, 172n77, 253–4

- lena* ('bawd'), 153, 154
 Lepidina, Sulpicia, 201n25
 'lesbian' poem, 197–202, 210–18
 See also homosexuality
 Licinus (epigrammist), 146
 literacy, 6, 9, 19
 literary, 14, 69, 194, 237, 249
 orality and, 20–32, 46–52
 among women, 200–1, 217–18
 writing materials for, 45,
 187–8, 188
 see also education
litterae humaniores, 49n14
 Livius (poet), 193–4
 Livy (historian), 50, 241
 Lucretius Fronto, Marcus, 108–16, 111

 Maiuri, Amadeo, 24n55, 90
 Maius Castricius, House of, 171–4, 182–4,
 200, 257–8
 Martial, 10, 36
 diminutives in, 214n36
 epigrams of, 42–3, 60, 64, 96
 panegyrics of, 114
 on Philaenis, 218
 on plagiarism, 138, 139, 188
 use of paradox in, 115
 Mau, Augustus, 14, 137, 145, 163n49
 McMullen, R., 45n2
 Meleager, 139, 150
 Memmius, Gaius, 99
 Menenius Agrippa, 123
 Menander, 140n11, 194–5
 Mercury, 78, 93–5, 255
 Mercury, Street of, 86
 Meyer's law, 156n43
 Micon and Pero fresco, 109–12, 111
 Milton, John, 6, 36
 'modesty', 109–12, 111, 115–18
 Mommsen, Theodor, 14
 Morelli, A. F., 64
 Morgan, Llewelyn, 7
 Morrison, A. D., 167
 Morstein-Marx, R., 98n4
 Murdia, epitaph of, 216n40
 Mussolini, Benito, 13

 Nappo, S. C., 226n56
 Narcissus, 90, 141
 Nero, Roman emperor, 40, 130–4
 gladiatorial ban of, 127
 graffiti about, 97, 100
 suicide of, 132
 Nero's Golden House, 55–6
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 141–2

 Nodier, C., 34
 Nuceria Gate, 55, 68n70, 182

 Octavius Quarto, House of, 90
 Opimius, Lucius, 100
 orality, 219
 literacy and, 20–32, 46–52
 memory training and, 50
 see also literacy
ordo decurionum, 105
 Orso Ferito, House of the, 80, 81
 Oscan language, 18
 Ostia, 5
 Ovid, 41, 150–1
 poetic allusions in, 141
 on poetic meter, 71–2
 works of
 Amores, 150–1, 155, 192–3, 207–8
 Ars Amatoria, 154–7
 Heroides, 165, 193n6, 203, 206
 owl, screech, 164, 248–51

 palindromes, 25–6
 panegyrics, 113, 114, 116, 122
 Paquius Proculus, 112n39, 242n30
 paraclausithyron, 38–9, 79n96
 Pero and Micon fresco, 109–12, 111
 Persius, 74–5, 101, 193
 Petronius, 20, 207–8, 261
 Phaedrus, 212
 Phillipus, Gaius Julius, 128, 132
Phoenix felix et tu sign, 46, 81–3, 82, 87
pietas, 110–12, 116–17
 plagiarism, 138–9, 188
 Plato, 75n92, 274
 Plautus, 38, 176
 Plutarch, 97, 100, 234, 277–8
 'On Being a Busybody', 273–4
 Pobjoy, Mark, 52n22
 Poethler, E. E., 48n12
 poetics, 10–11
 literary appropriation in, 140–1
 pedagogy of, 58, 71, 237, 248
 political, 100, 104–35, 125, 134
 Polybius (Greek historian), 234, 236
 Pompeii
 destruction of, 5, 11, 15, 19, 243
 earthquakes in, 13, 15, 17–19, 131
 Herculaneum and, 8, 13, 20, 34
 map of, 14–15, 16
 rebuilding of, 131
 Porta di Nola, 105
 Porta Vesuviana, 180
 pottery, 27, 148–9, 226
 Priapus, 88–9, 91, 94–5

- 'Procula' programma, 116–18
programmata, 5, 20, 97–135, 103, 111, 113
authorship of, 147, 160
by Aemilius Celer, 227–8
J. L. Franklin on, 13n26
of Cuspius Pansa, 108–9, 112–16, 113, 242–5, 243, 249–52, 259
poetic, 104–18, 111, 113
on shop sign, 78
as sign of democracy, 102n20
Propercius, House of (Assisi), 85–7
Propercius, Sextus, 41, 157, 195–6
on *Aeneid*, 237
poetic meter in, 208
on unfaithfulness, 215
Pseudo-Demetrius, 169n63
Pseudo-Lucian, 21, 22
Publius Syrus, 176–8
public/private spaces, 4–5, 21–2, 50–3, 57–8, 160–1
'Public Service Announcement' (modern graffito), 1–4

pudor, 109–12, 111, 115–18
Purcell, N., 26n63
Pyramus and Thisbe, 90, 199

Quintilian, 187, 253–4
on epigrams, 140, 175
on teaching, 195, 248
quisquis amat . . . , 152, 157, 184–9, 185, 219, 250–2

Ramsby, Teresa, 63
Rawson, E., 180n89
Regulus, Marcus Atilius, 234
riddles, 29, 179, 200
Romanticism, 21, 33–5
Rosenblatt, Roger, 277
Rosenmeyer, P. A., 165n52
Rosivach, V. J., 91n126
Ross, David O., 145, 149, 214n37
Rouet, P., 148n34
Rustius Verus, 105

Sabinus, Marcus Epidius, 102, 107
Sacerdos, Marius Plotius, 257
Safaitic graffiti, 19n42, 161n45
Salvius, Caupona of, 84–7, 85
Sappho, 223n48
Saturnian meter, 61
scatological graffiti, 53–9, 56, 59, 64–6, 124
Scientists, House of the, 92
Scipio Africanus, 50, 61
senarius (metrical pattern), 100, 116, 156, 177–9
Seneca the Younger
correspondence of, 162, 165, 170
on *ocliferia*, 79
on Publius Syrus, 176
sententiae, 140, 175–9
compilations of, 176–7, 179, 234
septenarii, 179
Sicily, 98
signage, 51–2, 69, 102
programmata and, 104, 244
of shops, 45–8, 78, 81–3, 82
of streets, 18, 46–8, 57, 242
Silver Wedding, House of, 17
Siricus, House of, 238
Smyrna, graffiti of, 10
snakes-and-altar frescoes, 55–7, 56, 58n41, 59
Social Wars, 18
Sogliano, Antonio, 14, 197
on Tiburtinus, 143, 145
Solin, Heikki, 145, 171, 200n24
Sontag, Susan, 160–1, 174
sphragis poems, 147–8
Squire, Michael, 78n95, 85–6
Starr, R. J., 138n3
Stewart, Andrew, 149n35
Strabo, 97
Suburban Baths (Herculaneum), 20
Suetonius, 97, 261
Sulpician poems, 200, 202, 218
Sutro Baths graffiti, 1–3
Svenbro, Jasper, 73n83, 75

Tabula Heracleensis, 47n12
Tacitus, 115, 239–40, 261
Tandoi, V., 147n28
Tarrant, R. J., 91n127
Taylor, C., 34
technopaignia, 26–7, 27
Terence, 195
Terentius Eudoxus, Marcus, 120–2
Themistius, 234
Theocritus, 23
Theognis, 'seal' of, 147–8
Thisbe and Pyramus, 90, 199
Thomas, J. D., 173n80
Thomas, M. W., 141n15
Thomas, Rosalind, 25
Tiberius, Roman emperor, 17, 101, 115
Tibullan corpus, 200, 202
Tiburtinus, Loreius, 41, 141–59, 152, 155, 212
line markings of, 146, 209–10
signature of, 145, 147, 158–9
Todd, F. A., 71
Tragic Poet, House of the, 45, 122, 247n34

- Trapp, M., 162n48
 trees, writing on, 21–4, 275–6
 Triclinium, House of the, 87
 ‘Trojan group’ fresco, 238–9, 239, 249–50, 252
- Ulutremulus, Fabius, 248–9
 ‘house’ of, 238n16, 248, 249, 251, 252
- Varone, Antonio, 8, 124n63, 149, 181, 191n1
- Varro, 61–2
- Vatia, Marcus Cerrinius, 105
- Ventidius Bassus, Publius, 97–8
- Ventrio, Gaius Hadius, 120
- ‘Venus Fisica Pompeiana’, 92, 150
- verecundia* (‘modesty’), 115
- Verres, Gaius, 100
- ‘verse capping’, 196n13
- Veyne, Paul, 98
- Via dell’Abbondanza, 26, 40, 67, 128, 147, 263
- Via Nuceria, 55, 68n70, 182
- Vibii family, 125–6
- Vindolanda tablets, 165–6, 171–4, 201
- Virgil, 142, 182, 236–62, 275
 epitaph of, 61
 pedagogical uses of, 58, 237, 248
 works of
 Aeneid, 24, 42, 96, 124, 219, 236–70, 239
 Eclogues, 23, 211, 247, 259–61, 270–2
 Georgics, 247, 259, 260, 272
- Vivolo, F. P. M., 191n1
- Wachter, Rudolf, 30n72, 38n94, 181, 182
- Williams, William Carlos, 31
- Williamson, C., 48n13
- Wolf, Greg, 51
- Wordsworth, Christopher, 5–6, 35–8, 260n57
- World War II, 4, 13
- Xanthippus, 234
- Zanker, Paul, 19
zetema, see riddles

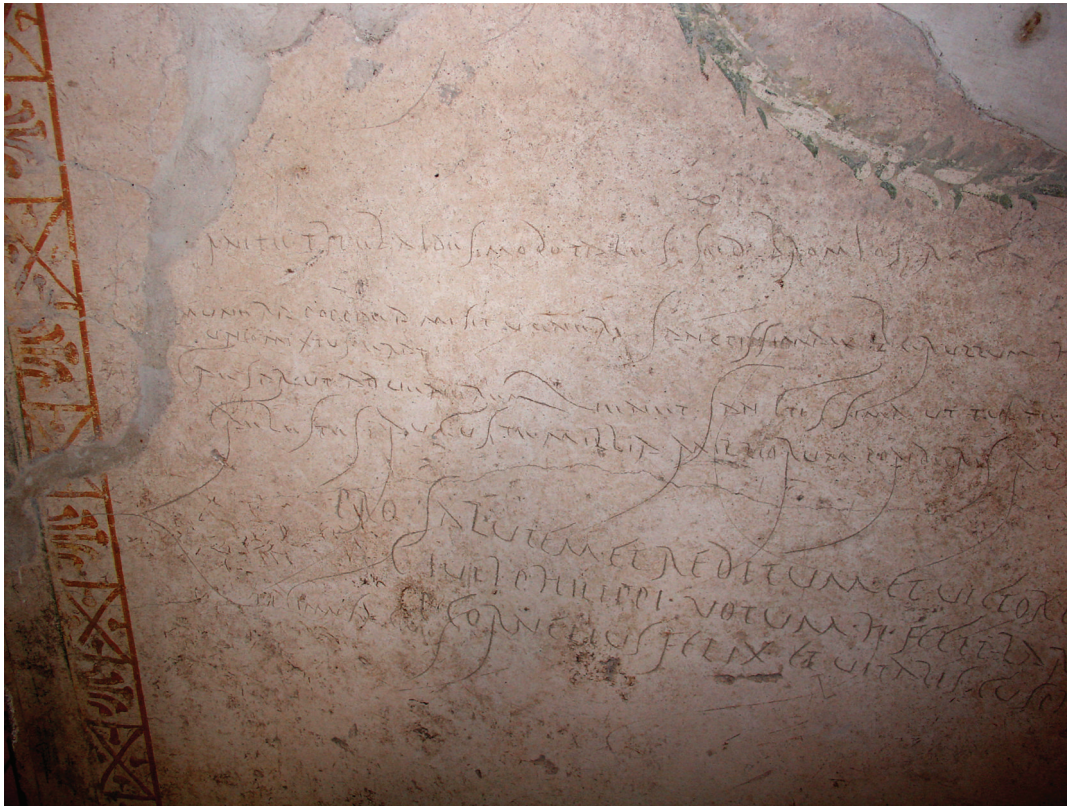


Plate 1. Detail of plaster fragment showing graffiti from the House of Julius Polybius (9. 13. 1–3)



Plate 2. Plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 4966-73



Plate 3. Detail of plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 4966



Plate 4. Detail of plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 4967–70



Plate 5. Detail of plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 4971-3

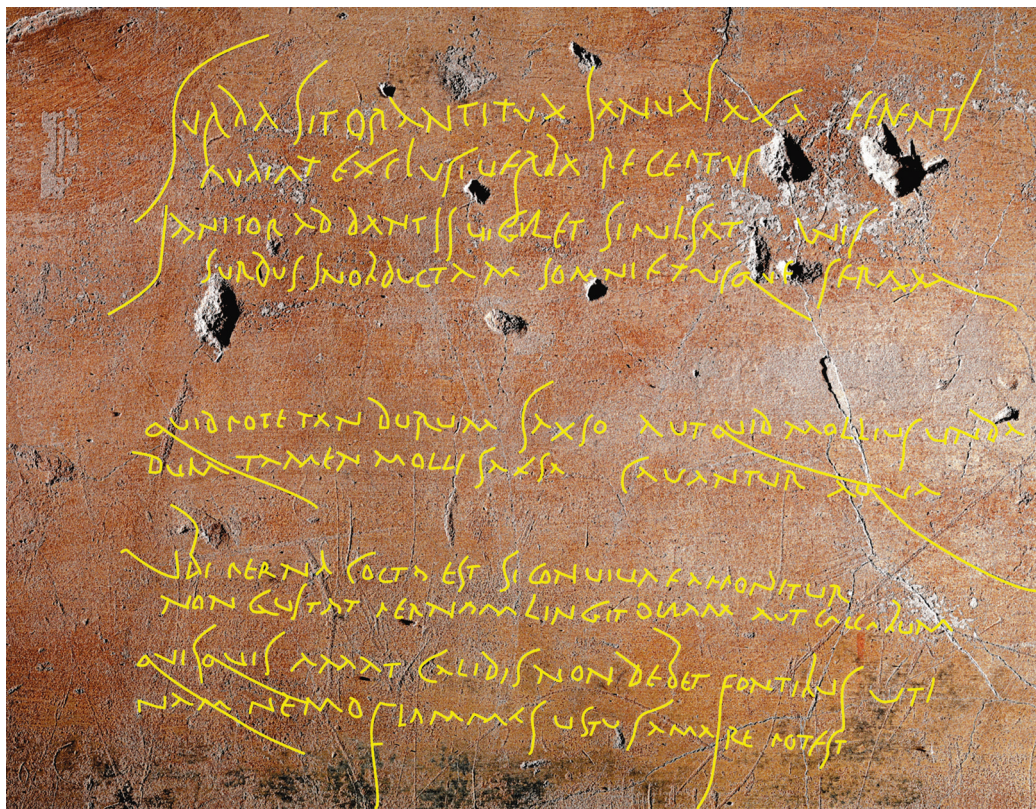


Plate 6. Plaster fragment preserving CIL 4. 1893-8



Plate 7. Plaster fragment preserving CIL 4. 5296-9

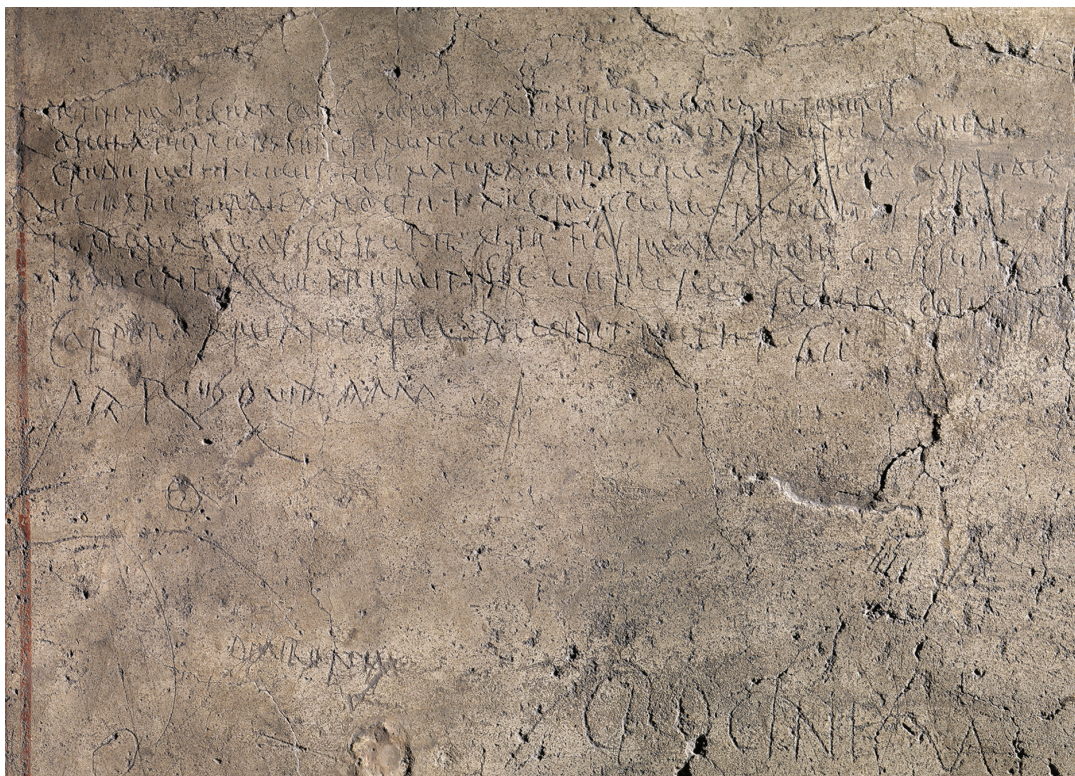


Plate 8. Detail of plaster fragment preserving *CIL* 4. 5296