The Terms *komos* and *paraclausithyron*

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For some sixty years the starting point for all studies of the lover who in Greek and Latin poetry attempts to gain access to his/her beloved’s house has been Frank O. Copley’s *Exclusus Amator*, a work which greatly benefited scholarship by bringing to general attention an important ancient literary genre. However, the many new and valid insights to be found in *Exclusus Amator* and its successors have been accompanied by a measure of terminological muddle, lack of information, and downright inaccuracy. To be precise: the terms used to specify the genre involved, *komos* and *paraclausithyron*, are often employed in confused and self-contradictory ways; there is little awareness of the textual insecurity of the Plutarchan *hapax legomenon* παρακλαυσίθυρον; and an incorrect rendering of παρακλαυσίθυρον is pervasive in classical scholarship. These issues, and their consequences for the study of the genre in question, are addressed here.

1. *Paraclausithyron or komos?*

Four of the eight chapter headings of *Exclusus Amator* contain the term *paraclausithyron*, which Copley used throughout to refer to the entire sequence of events surrounding the excluded lover:

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2. I write here for convenience of the “excluded lover,” but with awareness
his/her progress to the door of the beloved, his/her various performances there including (sometimes) a song, the rejection/exclusion which most often followed, and the lover’s reactions to it. But Copley nevertheless also included a note which undermines his own usage of *paraclausithyron*, exposes confusion at the root of his terminology, and reveals the correct name of the genre about which he is writing (145 n. 6):

As it happens, a simple explanation for most of the features of the paraclausithyron lies in the fact that the word used by the ancients to designate it is not παρακλαυσίθυρον, but κώμος, together with the corresponding verbs κομάζειν and ἐπικομάζειν.

Copley went on to cite some Hellenistic sources in which the activities of the excluded lover are referred to as κώμος/κομάζειν, etc.³ (these terms can also be found in earlier texts⁴).

Copley had already defined παρακλαυσίθυρον in his text as “the song sung by the lover at his mistress’s door” (1). This definition shows his awareness that παρακλαυσίθυρον can refer only to the song of the excluded lover, and not to other actions of the lover. But this did not inhibit him from an expanded, erroneous use of it. The same confusion is found earlier in his 1942 paper, which has as its heading/summary:⁵

Four conventional features of the paraclausithyron, 1. the lover’s procession through the streets, 2. his drunkenness, 3. his garland, and 4. his vigil by the door, are explained as having been derived from corresponding features of the ancient κώμος.

that this description does not cover cases of admission of lovers, and entry, forceful or not, by lovers, which are equally κομοί: see §3 below.


Copley had possibly been misled by the substantial note in which H. V. Canter attempted to justify the unjustifiable view of H. de la Ville de Mirmont that the -κλαυ- element of παρακλαυσίθυρον derives from κλείω (see §3 below).

By the repeated misapplications of paraclausithyron Copley perpetuated a terminological muddle which has persisted widely to this day: many scholars employ komos and paraclausithyron as if they are synonyms, and others argue that paraclausithyron, not komos, is the appropriate term for poems involving the excluded lover. This is all the more regrettable given that Georg Luck, in his (German-language!) review of Exclusus Amator, corrected Copley on this very point:

Das Buch leidet an der ungenügenden Unterscheidung zwischen der Situation des exclusus amator, dem Komos, der sie vorbereiten kann, und dem Lied an der Schwelle. Nur das letztere ist ein Paraclausithyron im eigentlichen Sinne ... Es ist irreführend, zu sagen, κώμος und P<arakausithyron> seien identisch (145, Anm. 6), und wenn der Verf. immer wieder Texte heranzieht, in denen nur vom Komos die Rede ist (z. B. Meleager AP 12, 119), so verwischt er Unterschiede, die literaturgeschichtlich von Bedeutung sind.

As Luck emphasised, the Greek term for the journey of the lover to the door of the beloved with the intention of gaining entry and enjoying the favours of the latter is κώμος (κωμάζειν); κώμος can also be extended to cover all or some of the lover’s manifold subsequent activities at the door should s/he (as was usual) be excluded. Luck’s strictures have been taken note of in a few

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7 For this reason I have on occasion felt obliged to write “komos/paraclausithyron” for fear that readers might fail to understand “komos” alone.

8 Notably J. C. Yardley, “The Elegiac paraclausithyron,” Eranos 76 (1978) 19–34, esp. 19; Cummings, Observations, who lays out all the evidence in favour of komos as the correct term for the activities of the excluded lover (7–37 = ch. 1), but ends by insisting on “paraclausithuric situation.”

quarters, but they have generally been overlooked or ignored. The term *komos* has, of course, several other, sometimes broader, applications, but this does not detract from the meaningfulness of its specific use to describe the erotic quest of a lover. Insistence on the distinction between *komos* and *paraclausithyron* in the context of the excluded lover is not pedantry: *komos* may involve a whole sequence of actions on the part of the komast, including the performance of a song, whereas *paraclausithyron* (if it is a genuine Greek term: see §2) is the komast’s song, and nothing more; cf. “Τὸ παρακλαυσίθυρον (sc. μέλος ή δοξα) ist ein Lied, gesungen an der Haustür oder vielleicht abseits der Strasse, an einer Nebentür.”

2. The term *paraclausithyron*

παρακλαυσίθυρον appears only once in antiquity. Copley’s remarks on its provenance are confined to two endnotes:

144 n.1: The locus classicus for the name is Plut. Amat. 753B: τίς οὖν ὁ κωλύων ἐστὶ κωμάζειν ἐπί θύρας, ἄδειν τὸ παρακλαυσίθυρον, κτλ.

150 n.59: Plutarch in the passage which has given the song its name (τὸ παρακλαυσίθυρον) speaks of the singer as a woman.

Greater emphasis needs to be given to the uniqueness, lateness, abnormality, semantic uncertainty, and textual insecurity of παρακλαυσίθυρον. Plutarch’s *Amatorius* is a dialogue about love. Part of it describes an attractive young man being sought in marriage by a rich, somewhat older, widow. One of the speakers who express opinions about her quest disapproves, commenting inter alia (753A–B):

“ἐρᾶται γὰρ αὐτοῦ νὴ Δία καὶ κάεται”. τίς οὖν ὁ κωλύων ἐστὶ κωμάζειν ἐπί θύρας, ἄδειν τὸ παρακλαυσίθυρον, ἀναδεῖν τὰ εἰκόνια, παγκρατιάζειν πρὸς τοὺς ἀντεραστάς; ταῦτα γὰρ ἐρωτικά.

10 Cairns, Generic Composition 6; Pinotti, GIF 29 (1977) 50–71.
12 Luck, Gnomon 29 (1957) 342.
“Yes,” you say, “for she’s in love with him, she’s all on fire.” Who, then, prevents her from making revel-rout to his house, from singing the Complaint Before the Closed Door, from putting nosegays on his portraits, from entering the ring with her rivals? These are the actions of true lovers. (transl. W. C. Hembold)

παρακλαυσίθυρον is patently only one of a number of activities which the woman, in her imagined role as komast, might undertake: and equally clearly it involves singing a song.

This raises the question how παρακλαυσίθυρον compares with other ancient Greek names of tunes, songs, and dances. Many of these are listed at Athenaeus 618c–619e (which contains part of Tryphon Onomasiai Book 2 = fr.113 Velsen) and 629c–631d. Much of Athenaeus’ material is repeated at Pollux 4.99–105, who also offers some new items, indicated by (P) when quoted below. The names of tunes etc. are often uncompounded nouns derived from a verb or from another noun: e.g. κῶµος, βίβασις (P), ξιφισµός, καλαθίσκος, πολεµικόν. Occasionally an inventor’s name is adapted: e.g. βαρµυλλικά, τὸ µὲν εὐήµµα Βαρµυλλίκου (P), or a dance is named after the creature imitated: e.g. λέων, γέρανον (P). Yet other musical names are compounds: some combine a preposition with a noun or verb element: e.g. καταβαυκαλήσεις, ἐκλακτίσατα (P), ἐπίφαλλος; or they combine adjective and noun elements: e.g. ἡδύκωµος, καλλίνικος; or two noun elements: e.g. σικιννοτύρβη, δηµήτρουλοι. A few are noun-verb/verb-noun compounds: viz. φιληλιας, κερνοφόρος, θυροκοτικόν, κρουσίθυρον, ὠχοφορικό. παρακλαυσίθυρον is a verb-noun compound, but it is anomalous. The noun-verb/verb-

13 A female komast is found much less frequently, but cf. e.g. Fragmentum Grenfellianum; Plaut. Mil. 1249–1255; Hor. Carm. 1.25.9–20.

14 Mistranslations such as this and R. Flacelière, Plutarche: Dialogue sur l’Amour (Paris 1952) 56 (“la complainte de la porte close”) reflect the erroneous understanding of paraclausithyron discussed in §3.

15 In this paragraph the exact forms found in Athenaeus/Pollux are quoted.

16 Glossed as ὀρχηµα ὧδ’ ὃτι λίκνα ἢ ἐσχαρίδας φέροντες· κέρνα δὲ ταύτα ἐκαλεῖτο (Pollux 4.103).
noun names in Athenaeus (including θυροκοπικόν and κρουσι-θυρον, two synonymous titles of flute-pieces linked with the komos) combine a transitive verb element with a noun element serving as object of the verb element. But in παρακλαυσίθυρον, -θυρον must stand for a dative.

That anomaly further encourages the question whether παρακλαυσίθυρον is a correct reading. Adelmo Barigazzi in his major study of the Amatorius was in no doubt about the overall insecurity of its text: “La tradizione testuale non è buona: numerose sono le corruttele e le lacune, per lo più brevi o brevis-sime.”17 Amatorius 753B presents many small MS. corruptions,18 which can be resolved more or less easily, but which do not inspire confidence in the transmitted text. The late Prof. E. Kerr Borthwick once in private discussion questioned the soundness of the term παρακλαυσίθυρον, and suggested that Plutarch had perhaps quoted the beginning of a komast’s song as its title (i.e. τὸ “παρακαλῶ σε, θύρα”), and that this song incipit was then corrupted to τὸ παρακλαυσίθυρον. Such a direct quotation of a song title would suit the ironic tone of Plutarch’s speaker. Another possibility is that, if sound, παρακλαυσίθυρον is a humorous coinage by Plutarch, which would account for its uniqueness. It might, of course, be argued that, even if the status of παρακλαυσίθυρον qua ancient technical term is uncertain, it could still be useful. This is true: we happily employ the modern invented term epyllion for short hexameter narrative poems,19 and some generic titles are either late or constructed by anal-

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19 Epyllion has been traced back as far as K. D. Ilgen, Hymni Homerici cum reliquis carminibus minoribus (Halle 1796); for details see S. Tilg, “On the Origins of the Modern Term ‘Epyllion’: Some Revisions to a Chapter in the History of Classical Scholarship,” in M. Baumbach et al. (eds.) Brill’s Companion to Greek and Latin Epyllion and its Reception (Leiden/Boston 2012) 29–54, at 34–36.
ogy.\textsuperscript{20} But, if we employ \textit{paraclausithyron}, we should do so in full awareness of its fragile status, and we should restrict it to the komast’s song.

3. The meaning of \textit{paraclausithyron}

Accompanying the misuse of \textit{paraclausithyron} in place of \textit{komos} is a common mistranslation of \textit{παρακλαυσίθυρον} as “song at the closed door” vel sim. Even the most casual of searches turns up examples: “the type of poem technically known as \textit{paraclausithyron} (sc. \textit{metos}) or Song at the \textbf{Closed Door}”; “a \textit{paraclausithyron} or ‘song at the \textbf{closed} door’”; “a kind of \textit{paraclausithyron} (‘lament by the \textbf{closed} door”).”\textsuperscript{22} Several of the contributors to \textit{A Companion to Roman Love Elegy}\textsuperscript{23} employ \textit{paraclausithyron} with varying degrees of inexactitude, one offering “the Hellenistic \textit{paraclausithyron}, the song at the \textbf{closed} door” (146).

In fact \textit{παρακλαυσίθυρον} can only mean a “whine” or a “lament” “to/at the door.” The \textit{κλαυσ-} element must derive from \textit{κλαίω} (“to lament”),\textsuperscript{24} and not from \textit{κλείω} (“to close”).\textsuperscript{25} The mistranslation which introduces the “closed door” must be partly responsible for the long-lasting muddle over \textit{komos} and \textit{paraclausithyron}, and it explains the strange partiality of scholars for \textit{paraclausithyron} as a technical term. But one still wonders why the mistranslation is so ubiquitous. I suspect that the phonetic similarity between \textit{κλαυσ-} and the perfect and supine forms of

\textsuperscript{20} E.g. \textit{oaristys} (late) and \textit{erotodidaxis} (a modern extrapolation from \textit{ἐρωτο-διδάσκαλος}).

\textsuperscript{21} Emboldenings of words from this point on are mine.


\textsuperscript{23} Ed. B. K. Gold (Chichester 2012).

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{παρακλαίω} is intransitive (cf. Rufinus \textit{Anth.Gr.} 5.103.1 \textit{παρακλαίωνα}; schol. Ar. \textit{Vesp.} 977, where \textit{παρακλαίωνα} glosses \textit{κνυζομενα}). It can be used with a dative: cf. (of Patroclus) \textit{Ἀχιλλεύι \ παρακλαίει: “he whines to Achilles”} (schol. bT \textit{Il.} 1.307).

\textsuperscript{25} I am indebted to the late Henry Blumenthal for confirmation that a derivation from \textit{κλείω} is impossible.
Latin *claudo* (“close”), i.e. *clausi* and *clausum*, and indeed English “closed,” has subconsciously lulled some scholars into the belief that παρακλαυσιθυρον means “the song at the closed door,” which it cannot mean. The ease with which the error can intrude is illustrated by Garte,\(^{26}\) where the correct derivation from κλαίω (3) is followed by the paraphrase “carmen cantare flebile ante portam clausam” on the next page (4).

Unfortunately the error is likely to proliferate even more widely now that it is embedded in a recent work of reference, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, which, although it rightly derives παρακλαυσιθυρον from παρακλαίω and θύρα, also defines the term as “lament at a closed door, sort of serenade.”\(^ {27}\) There are, however, rays of hope: the *Diccionario de motivos amatorios en la literatura latina* rightly glosses παρακλαυσιθυρον as “quejas ante la puerta”;\(^ {28}\) and the *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* derives the term correctly and offers a correct paraphrase: “lover’s complaint sung at his mistresses’s [sic] door, serenade.”\(^ {29}\)

All this is not just a matter of terminology: as already shown, the muddling of *komos* and *paraclausithyron* confuses whole and part—the overall activity, the *komos*, with one (optional) part of it, the komast’s song, the *paraclausithyron*. Again, I have argued (§2 above) that *paraclausithyron* may not be a genuine Greek term; and, even if it is, and even if it is used with awareness of its sole possible meaning, “whining (vel sim.) to/at the door,” its use leads almost inevitably to the privileging of a single, non-essential element of the *komos* of the excluded lover—a song in which a lover whines/laments at the door—over its numerous other topoi. The fact that a lover’s song has no special status

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\(^{27}\) Ed. F. Montanari, with M. Goh and C. Schroeder (Leiden/Boston 2015) 1552.

\(^{28}\) Ed. R. Moreno Soldevila (Huelva 2011) 373.

\(^{29}\) Ed. R. Beckes, with L. van Beek (Leiden/Boston 2009) II 1151.
within the *komos* of the excluded lover emerges clearly from Paula Pinotti’s copiously documented analysis of its commonplaces into thirteen topoi/topical clusters. According to Pinotti, the sum of the excluded komastic lover’s actions, words, and experiences is: requests to open the door, accusations of cruelty addressed to the beloved, the door, or the porter; laments, tears, suffering, shame, desperation, plans to commit suicide; bad weather, night, rain, wind, cold (often in combinations); a long vigil, or sleep, on the threshold; *captatio benevolentiae* of the beloved, door, or porter through valuable gifts, worship, offerings of wine, unguents, kisses, or garlands; momentary hope; boasts of virtue or wealth, and fear of seeming aggressive; appeal to a god or goddess; mention of a rival, often insulting; threats to attack the door, to go away, of a reversal of role, and of divine anger; an attack on the door, or a street battle with rival(s); the arrival of dawn, announced by cock-crow or bird-song. Thus “Lamenti dell’exclusus amator” (54) constitute one sixth of one of Pinotti’s thirteen topoi/topical clusters—and one might add to her list the earlier processional progress of the lover through the streets from the symposium to the door, accompanied by friends or slaves, clad in symposiastic attire and wreaths, and inflamed by love and wine.

Finally, if *paraclausithyron* is substituted for *komos*, and especially if the false derivation of κλαυσ- in παρακλαυσίθυρον from κλείω is implied or assumed as part of the substitution, there is an even more intellectually restrictive consequence: the impression is created that the erotic *komos* is co-extensive with the *komos* of the *exclusus amator*. This is decidedly not the case, since there are at

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30 Pinotti, *GIF* 29 (1977) 64–70, B1–B11 and B13; her B12 (“Assalto effettivo alla porta (o rissa in strada con altri inamorati)” in fact belongs to another type of erotic *komos* (see below).

31 Further related topoi could be added here and there to this scheme (e.g. the lover writing on the door or attaching verses to it, or the lover encountering the mockery of passers-by) but the point has been made.

32 In some *komoi* featuring a closed door vel sim. the beloved is asked to come out (and may come out) rather than admit the lover: e.g. Theocr. *Id.*
least three other types of erotic komos in addition to that of the exclusus amator. One is the komos of the admissus amator, who is able to enter the house of the beloved, either as a result of negotiation at the door, or because he is invited, or because he is otherwise entitled to enter: examples, in addition to those mentioned by Copley, are Theoc. Id. 2.102 ff., cf. 118 ff.; Posidippus Anth. Gr. 5.213; Propertius 1.3, 2.29; Lucian Bis Accusatus 31; Alciphron Ep. 1.6.2; and [Aristaenetus] Epist. 2.19. Yet another type of erotic komos is that of violent entry: e.g. Herodas 2; Tibullus 1.1.73–74; Ovid Am. 1.9.19–20, Ars Am. 3.71, 567; and Heliodorus Aethiopica 4.17.3–4. Finally there is the komos of the desertus amator, a variant only recently identified; in it, after giving a promise to the lover to come to his house, the beloved does not come. Some examples are Asclepiades Anth. Gr. 5.7 and 5.150; Meleager Anth. Gr. 5.152; Horace Sat. 1.5.82–85; Martial 11.73; and Strato Anth. Gr. 12.201. The intellectual impoverishment resulting from neglect of these variants of the erotic komos is most easily avoided if we give the genre in question its correct ancient name: κῶμος.

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11.42, 63; [Aristaen.] Epist. 2.4; Plaut. Curc. 1–157; Eupolis Εἵλωτες fr.148.3 K.-A. (quoted by Ath. 638E); Ar. Lys. 850, 875.

33 Exclusus Amator 10, 17; Copley dwelt little on the komos of the admissus amator, and believed (wrongly) that admission occurred only in drama and real life.


35 This variant may relate to the street-fighting at doors between youthful komastic rivals mentioned at Plut. Amat. 753B (παγκρατιάζειν πρὸς τοὺς ἀντεραστάς), and earlier documented (e.g.) by Pratinas (the agent is the flute): PMG 708.8–9, κῶμοι μόνον θυραχύς ιδέες τε πυγάχιας νέων θέλοι παροίνον / ἐμιμεναι στρατηλάτας, and implied there to be a standard event.


37 I am grateful to Ian Duquesnay and Tony Woodman for helpful comments.