

The Terms *komos* and *paraclausithyron*

Francis Cairns

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*,¹ 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:²

¹ F. O. Copley, *Exclusus Amator: A Study in Latin Love Poetry* (Baltimore 1956); some earlier studies are listed at 144 n.1; for subsequent contributions see (inter alia) F. Cairns, *Generic Composition in Greek and Roman Poetry* (Edinburgh 1972), Index of Genres and Examples s.v. KOMOS; M. S. Cummings, *Observations on the Development and Code of the Pre-Elegiac Paraklausithyron* (diss. Univ. of Ottawa 1996), and "The Early Greek Paraclausithyron and Gnesippus," *Scholia* 10 (2001) 38–53; P. Pinotti, "Propert. IV 9: Alessandrino e arte allusiva," *GIF* 29 (1977) 50–71.

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 *κῶμος*, together with the corresponding verbs *κωμάζειν* and *ἐπικωμάζειν*.

Copley went on to cite some Hellenistic sources in which the activities of the excluded lover are referred to as *κῶμος/κωμάζειν*, 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 *κῶμος*.

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

³ Asclep. *Anth.Gr.* 5.64.4; Theoc. *Id.* 3.1; Call. *Anth.Gr.* 12.118.1; Meleager *Anth.Gr.* 5.165.2, 5, 5.190.2, 5.191.2, 8, 12.23.2, 12.117.2–3, 12.119.1, 12.167.2; Anon. *Anth.Gr.* 12.115.3, 116.1. More could be added.

⁴ Alc. fr.374 Voigt; Anac. *PMG* 373.3, (?)442; Hermesianax fr.7.37–38 *Coll.Alex.* (implying that Mimnermus had composed *komoi*), fr.7.47–48 (re Alcaeus). For further early examples see Cummings, *Scholia* 10 (2001) 38–53.

⁵ F. O. Copley, “On the Origin of Certain Features of the *Paraclausithyron*,” *TAPA* 73 (1942) 96–107, at 96.

Copley had possibly been misled by the substantial note⁶ 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,⁷ and others argue that *paraclausithyron*, not *komos*, is the appropriate term for poems involving the excluded lover.⁸ This is all the more regrettable given that Georg Luck, in his (German-language!) review of *Exclusus Amator*, corrected Copley on this very point:⁹

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 Paraklausithyron im eigentlichen Sinne ... Es ist irreführend, zu sagen, κῶμος und Paraklausithyron 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 κῶμος (κωμάζειν); κῶμος 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

⁶ H. V. Canter, "The Paraclausithyron as a Literary Theme," *AJP* 41 (1920) 355–368, at 356–358 n.11.

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."

⁹ G. Luck, *Gnomon* 29 (1957) 338, cf. 342.

quarters,¹⁰ but they have generally been overlooked or ignored. The term *komos* has, of course, several other, sometimes broader, applications,¹¹ 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 oder ᾠσμα) ist ein Lied, gesungen an der Haustür oder vielleicht abseits der Strasse, an einer Nebentür.”¹²

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 ἐπὶ 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 νῆ Δία καὶ κάεται”· τίς οὖν ὁ κωλύων ἐστὶ κωμάζειν ἐπὶ θύρας, ἄδειν τὸ παρακλαυσίθυρον, ἀναδειν τὰ εἰκόνα, παγκρατιάζειν πρὸς τοὺς ἀντεραστάς; ταῦτα γὰρ ἐρωτικά.

¹⁰ Cairns, *Generic Composition* 6; Pinotti, *GIF* 29 (1977) 50–71.

¹¹ Cf. Cummings, *Observations* 22–23.

¹² Luck, *Gnomon* 29 (1957) 342.

“Yes,” you say, “for she’s¹³ 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,¹⁴ from putting nosegays on his portraits, from entering the ring with her rivals? These are the actions of true lovers. (transl. W. C. Hembold)

ᾄδειν τὸ 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:¹⁵ e.g. κῶμος, βίβασις (P), ξιφισμός, καλαθίσκος, πολεμικόν. Occasionally an inventor’s name is adapted: e.g. βαρυλλικά, τὸ μὲν εὔρημα Βαρυλλίκου (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, ἐκλακτίσματα (P), ἐπίφαλλος; or they combine adjective and noun elements: e.g. ἡδύκωμος, καλλίνικος; or two noun elements: e.g. σικινοτύρβη, δημήτρουλοι. A few are noun-verb/verb-noun compounds: viz. φιληλιάς, κερνοφόρος,¹⁶ θυροκοπικόν, κρουσίθυρον, ὠσχοφορικοί. 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, *Plutarque: Dialogue sur l’Amour* (Paris 1952) 56 (“la complainte de la porte close”) reflect the erroneous understanding of *paraklausithyron* discussed in §3.

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

¹⁶ Glossed as ὄρχημα οἶδ’ ὅτι λίκνα ἢ ἐσαχρίδας φέροντες· κέρνα δὲ ταῦτα ἐκαλεῖτο (Pollux 4.103).

noun names in Athenaeus (including *θυροκοπικόν* and *κρουσίθυρον*, 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 brevissime.”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-

¹⁷ A. Barigazzi, “Note critiche ed esegetiche all’*Eroticos* di Plutarco,” *Prometheus* 12 (1986) 97–122, 245–266, at 97.

¹⁸ In that section, Barigazzi, *Prometheus* 12 (1986) 107–108, concentrated on the phrase *σχῆμα λαβοῦσα*.

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.²⁰ But, if we employ *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 paraclausithyron*

Accompanying the misuse of *paraclausithyron* in place of *komos* is a common mistranslation of παρακλαυσίθυρον as “song at the **closed**²¹ door” vel sim. Even the most casual of searches turns up examples: “the type of poem technically known as *paraklausithyron* (sc. *melos*) or Song at the **Closed Door**”; “a *paraklausithyron* or ‘song at the **closed door**’”; “a kind of *paraklausithyron* (‘lament by the **closed door**’).”²² Several of the contributors to *A Companion to Roman Love Elegy*²³ employ *paraclausithyron* with varying degrees of inexactitude, one offering “the Hellenistic *paraclausithyron*, the song at the **closed door**” (146).

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

²⁰ E.g. *oaristys* (late) and *erotodidaxis* (a modern extrapolation from ἐρωτο-διδάσκαλος).

²¹ Emboldenings of words from this point on are mine.

²² G. Lee, *Tibullus: Elegies* (Leeds 1990) 116; N. Livingstone and G. Nisbet, *Epigram* (Cambridge 2010) 73; T. S. Thorsen, “Ovid the Love Elegist,” in *Cambridge Companion to Latin Love Elegy* (Cambridge 2013) 112–132, at 119.

²³ Ed. B. K. Gold (Chichester 2012).

²⁴ παρακλαίω is intransitive (cf. Rufinus *Anth.Gr.* 5.103.1 παρακλαύσομαι; schol. Ar. *Vesp.* 977, where παρακλαίοντα glosses κνυζούμενα). It can be used with a dative: cf. (of Patroclus) Ἀχιλλεῖ παρακλαίει: “he whines to Achilles” (schol. bT *Il.* 1.307).

²⁵ I am indebted to the late Henry Blumenthal for confirmation that a derivation from κλείω is impossible.

Latin *claudio* (“close”), i.e. *clausi* and *clausum*, and indeed English “closed,” has subconsciously lulled some scholars into the belief that παρακλαυσίθυρον 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 παρακλαυσίθυρον 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 amorios en la literatura latina* rightly glosses παρακλαυσίθυρον 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

²⁶ O. Garte, *Paraclausithyri historia e litteris Graecis et Romanis illustratur* (diss. Leipzig 1924).

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. Beekes, 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 common-places into thirteen *topoi*/topical clusters.³⁰ According to Pinotti, the sum of the excluded komastic lover's actions, words, and experiences is:³¹ 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*.³² This is decidedly not the case, since there are at

³⁰ Pinotti, *GIF* 29 (1977) 64–70, B1–B11 and B13; her B12 ("Assalto effettivo alla porta (o rissa in strada con altri innamorati)") 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,³³ 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.* 2.19.³⁴ 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* 4.17.3–4.³⁵ Finally there is the *komos* of the *desertus amator*, a variant only recently identified;³⁶ 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.³⁷

February, 2020

Florida State University
fcairns@fsu.edu

11.42, 63; [Aristaen.] *Epist.* 2.4; Plaut. *Curc.* 1–157; Eupolis Εἴλωτες 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.

³⁴ Cf. F. Cairns, “Two Unidentified *Komoi* of Propertius. I 3 and II 29,” *Emerita* 45 (1977) 325–353 [= *Papers on Roman Elegy* (Bologna 2007) 35–58].

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, κόμφ μόνον θυραμάχοις τε πυγμαχίαισι νέων θέλοι παροίνων / ἔμμεναι στρατηλάτας), and implied there to be a standard event.

³⁶ Cf. F. Cairns, *Hellenistic Epigram: Contexts of Exploration* (Cambridge 2016) 363–366.

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