Lucian's Megilla/us:
Rethinking Gender, Agency, and Same-Sex Relationships

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I. Introduction

In recent years, scholars have become fascinated with the role of the courtesan in antiquity. Part of the attraction of the courtesan is her rebellion against socio-economic norms, her rejection of the conventional role of "house wife," and her enigmatic sexuality. Much of our understanding of these women can be attributed to the introduction of gender and queer theory into classical studies, which has encouraged us to read between the lines—for as Stallybrass and White have emphasized, "what is *socially* peripheral is so frequently *symbolically* central."[1] But we should be reminded, in our attempt to reconstruct the role and/or perceptions of women in Greek and Roman society, to not forget to read what *is* there. As we shall see in this thesis, the subtle differences of language can speak volumes.

In Holt Parker's "The Teratogenic Grid," he daringly claims that Roman sexuality was "a structuralist's dream," and then continues to break down every sexual act into a neat active vs. passive grid.[2] Although he draws attention to the "inversions" of the system, namely the "Abnormal Passive Male" and the "Abnormal Active Female," he misidentifies the prostitute as a sexually active "monster" and fails to make a distinction between this figure and the *tribas*, or "butch lesbian," who alone in the ancient literary tradition is represented as abnormal and masculine in her sexual behavior.[3]

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[1] Stallybrass and White 1986, 4-5.

[2] Parker 1997, 48-49. Parker's grid uses the distinction of the active and passive voice as an axis for determining the active and passive roles in sexual acts. Each act is distinguished by an active/masculine penetrator and a passive/feminine penetrated partner.

[3] Parker 1997, 58-59.

In this thesis, I will be looking primarily at Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, which includes both of these figures—courtesans ("mistresses" or *hetairai,* in Greek), and female homosexuals[4], in order to clarify some of the complications in Parker's systematic "grid." I will do this by drawing attention to the erotic language of Megilla, a female homosexual in Lucian's *Dialogue* V, as well as other representations of *tribades* in literature, whose vulgarity is associated with their masculine, and therefore *active*, sexual nature. In contrast, the speech attributed to the courtesan characters in Lucian's *Dialogues*, and also in other texts where these figures are put at the forefront (namely, New Comedy and Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*), lacks the suggestive qualities imbedded in the language of the *tribas*. The erotic language of female homosexuals juxtaposed with the absence of vulgar direct speech from courtesans in literature will allow distinctions to be made regarding their sexual roles: the *tribas* is represented as inherently masculine, and her suggestive speech coincides with this masculinity to reiterate her role as the active seducer, whereas the *hetaira's* controlled speech and easily persuadable nature thus emphasizes her passivity in sexual practice.

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[4] There is a debate among scholars as to whether the term "homosexual" can be used to identify those involved in, or desirous of, same-sex relations in antiquity. Brooten 1996 (8) prefers the term "homoerotic," due to the fact that the current popular usage of the term "homosexuality" evokes the image of a man more strongly than that of a woman; she also builds upon the work of David Halperin 1990 (15-53) and Foucault, who argues that homosexuality, as a concept and characteristic of a person, has existed only for the past one hundred years. In this paper, I will be using the term "homosexual" for certain tribadic figures because I find the use of "homoerotic" alone to be ineffectual based on the representation of their sexuality in their own texts. In support of Amy Richlin 1993, I believe the research thus far does not adequately resolve the issue of sexual identification and preferences in antiquity, nor does it exclude the possibility of homosexual subcultures in Greece and Rome.

The dominant sexual nature of female homosexuals and their one-dimensional personae (as represented in literature) in a pursuit toward sexual gratification attests to their inherent "otherness" in respect to other representations of women, which, particularly in Lucian's *Dialogues*, stands in stark contrast to the humanizing and often pitiable representation of the courtesans. Megilla's "other" nature is further emphasized in comparison to the language and actions of the male clients in the dialogues, whose lovesick whimpering only magnifies her single-mindedness and accentuated masculinity. To further explore the "otherness" attributed to female homosexuals in literature, I will look towards other representations of *tribades* in the literary and material record, focusing on the complex figure of Sappho, or rather, how she is constructed as homoerotic and sexually active in Ovid's *Heroides*, and how her vulgar language accentuates her masculinity in comparison to the representations of other women in the text.

The representations of the *hetaira* and the *tribas* are more complex than the simple "active" or "passive" identification that the "grid" encourages us to make. After reevaluating the sexual roles of these figures, I will explore the way in which the courtesan's exercise of agency challenges the presupposed gender roles of the classification system. I will argue that apart from her sexual passivity, the courtesan is represented with an autonomous agency by means of adopting masculine characteristics normally attributed to philosophers. The flexible gender role of the courtesan allows for a distinction between her sexual role and psychological disposition, and stands as a further indication of her indefinable complexity, whereas the *tribas*' abnormal sexuality defines her by her "masculinity" alone. Thus, this

analysis shows that, in some cases (i.e. the courtesan), sexuality is not determinant of identity, but in the case others (i.e. the lesbian), it is, and the attribution of these essentially mutable terms, which are ever subject to socially contingent realms, consequently constrains the formation of identity.

a. Terminology

The profession of prostitution in Greek and Roman society involved numerous classifications, occupational duties, and socio-economic distinctions—too many, in fact, to include in this thesis. Perhaps the most prevalent identities for female prostitutes, however, are those of *pornai* ("streetwalkers") and *hetairai* ("courtesans" or "mistresses"). Scholars have often been hesitant to identify distinctions between the two in classical society and thought; in fact, Dover has claimed that "the dividing line between the two categories could not be sharp," due to the fact that the underlying function between the two occupations is the exchange of sex for something of value.[5] Yet, recent studies, most notably those of Davidson and Kurke,[6] have examined rather the distinctions between the two figures in order to demonstrate their position in the complex network of economic exchange in classical Greece and the effect of such on social status.

Davidson identifies the distinction between the *pornē* and *hetaira* as one of commodity vs. gift exchange, which he bases on the linguistic derivation of the terms and the economical language associated with the two occupations in literature.

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[5] Dover 1989, 20-21.

[6] Davidson 1997; Kurke 1999.

"*Pornē*" (πορνή) stems from the Greek verb πέρνημι, "to sell (especially slaves)," which signifies a relationship conceived in terms of price; appropriately, terms of buying and selling are prevalent in this occupation, where brothels open to the public involve the exchange of money and sexual services with a large number of nameless clients.[7] In contrast, the Greek word "*hetaira*" (ἑταιρα) literally means "female companion," a title that equally exemplifies the ambiguity of the courtesan's services and the economic terms of her relationships; these women hold relatively permanent relationships with one or two clients whom they accompany and for whom they provide sexual favors for at private symposiums,[8] or drinking parties, in exchange for clothes, jewelry, or other luxuries predominately non-monetary in form. Davidson claims that the identifications of *hetaira* and *pornē* in Athens represent "discursive strategies," due to the fact that relationship between money and objects can often be inadequately distinguished, and also "symbolic oppositions," which are influenced and continuously enforced by societies.[9] Kurke, while building on Davidson's model of commodity vs. gift exchange/public vs. private, suggests that the opposition of *hetaira* and *pornē* is a consequence of the elite's complex political and social spheres in the Archaic and Classical periods, and that the *hetaira* is essentially a societal and literary invention made by the elite for a symposiastic setting, in order to

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[7] Davidson 1997, 112-120.

[8] McClure 2003, 21: "In addition to *hetairas,* other types of prostitutes played an important role at the symposium: the *auletris* (flute player*), citharist* (cithara player), *psaltria* (harpist), *orchestras* (dancer), and the *mousourgos* (singer) not only provided musical accompaniment or acrobatic entertainment during the party, but also probably engaged in sexual activities with symposiasts."

[9] Davidson 1997, 73-136.

purposefully remove her from the public obscenity embodied by the *pornē*.[10] In addition to literary sources, Kurke enriches the distinction of commodity vs. gift exchange by pointing out similar sentiments in vase iconography, where *pornai* are essentially "advertised" with their asking price inscribed above their own image; *hetairai* are frequently depicted in symposiums, drinking and playing games in a similar fashion as their elite male clients—their bodies and favors are not given a price.

In Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (III.xi), Socrates pays a visit to the beautiful and elaborately dressed Theodote. When noticing this woman's extravagance, Socrates asks how she makes a living, to which Theodote replies, "If someone, after becoming my friend, wishes to do good, that is my means of living" (Ἐάν τις, ἔφη, φίλος μοι γενόμενος εὖ ποιεῖν ἐθέλῃ, οὗτός μοι βίος ἐστί, III.xi.4). Theodote is a *hetaira*—she lives off the "kindness" (gifts) of others. Socrates then schools her on the appropriate way to earn friends, a passage in which "Xenophon's language very deliberately locates Theodote's sexual "favors" within an economy of aristocratic gift exchange, in which *philoi* who are "wealthy and lovers of beauty" (τοὺς φιλοκάλους καὶ πλουσίους) exchange gifts and gratify one another."[11] One of Socrates' methods for procuring companions urges Theodote to adopt a level of restraint, an elite ideal of male conduct that further distinguishes the actions of the *hetaira* from the rather rapacious *pornē*, who is permitted no amount of agency in her own relationships. While exercising restraint, the courtesan controls her own actions to procure clients

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[10] Kurke 1999, 219.

[11] Kurke 1999, 178.

and other components of her agenda, whereas the *pornē*, restricted to the environment of the public brothel, is merely a commodity controlled by the whims of her clients.[12]

The usage of the terms *hetaira* and *pornē* in relation to their appropriate occupations in classical society should not be seen as strictly binary, however—especially in moral terms. Authors often fluctuate in their usage of these labels, particularly in legal proceedings where the accusation of "*pornē*" insults a woman's virtue and citizen status, in contrast to the more euphemistic "*hetaira,*" which translations literally as "female companion." Such is the case in Apollodorus' speech *Against Neaira* in [Demosthenes] 59, where Apollodorus attacks the lifestyle of the courtesan Neaira in order to denigrate his political enemy Stephanus, who is allegedly a client of Neaira's. Davidson has pointed out Apollodorus's inconsistency between the terms *hetaira* and *pornē* in identifying Neaira,[13] but Miner has shown rather that "Apollodorus (like many of the orators) is strikingly consistent in his use of prostitution terminology, [which] is an integral part of his rhetorical strategy"; thus, the term *pornē* is not simply a substitute for *hetaira*, but is deliberately used for the purpose of slander in orations of this sort.[14]

b. Lucian, the Second Sophistic Movement, and Historical Analysis

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[12] The complex relationship between courtesans and philosophers and the issue of agency will be returned to later in the thesis.

[13] Davidson 1997, 73.

[14] Miner 2003, 20, 30.

The courtesan characters in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* present a more complicated view of prostitutes in antiquity, for, as Gilhuly and McClure have pointed out, our first evidence for *hetairai* appears in Athens, during the Archaic and Classical periods (6th-4th centuries B.C.E.). Lucian's *Dialogues*, however, were composed during the so-called Second Sophistic movement, a period extending roughly between 50 and 250 C.E. which is characterized by the male Greek elite's investment in, and emulation of, the language and culture of the classical (Attic) past. Sophistic authors (2nd century C.E.) were consciously re-representing courtesan figures, which in turn caused them to reflect "contemporary concerns with self-representation and display, nostalgia for the classical past and its importance for negotiating self-identity."[15] In her study of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, Gilhuly chooses not to follow the distinctions made by Davidson and Kurke, first because Lucian does not use the term *pornē* in any of the dialogues or other writings (thus raising the question as to whether Lucian himself was aware of these social distinctions), and secondly because "the 'courtesans' he represents do not have a particular association with gift exchange (and its social and political resonances) versus a monetary economy or with the symposium versus the polis."[16] Gilhuly reads Lucian's courtesans as both agents and objects, at once negotiating their exchanges with clients and acting as a commodity to be negotiated, thus representing "the coeval states of subjectivity and objectivity."[17] I prefer to see Lucian's courtesans in the discourse of Davidson and Kurke, for several dialogues recount events which take

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[15] McClure 2003, 2.

[16] Gilhuly 2007, 60.

[17] Gilhuly 2007, 61.

place at symposiums, and often include conversations centered around the exchange of gifts and monogamous companionships—in short, all the definitive characteristics mentioned previously are present. Finally, in contrast to Gilhuly, I will argue that Lucian's courtesans follow a long literary tradition that grants these figures a considerable amount of agency despite their passive sexual disposition by assuming attributes of intellect and restraint, qualities cultivated by elite male philosophers. The courtesan employs these traits as a means by which to attract clients, which emphasizes the fact that she is in control of her own relationships, and this, in turn, essentially rejects the notion of objectivity and negotiation.

Further problems in historical analyses arise when considering the political environment during which the growth of Sophistic literature took place, for this resurgence of "Greekness," signaled by literary and linguistic archaism, occurred during the height of the Roman Empire, when the entirety of Greece and the Near East were under the dominion of the Roman *imperator*. Yet, in contrast to the more "Romanized" colonies in the west, the Greek provinces in the east remained largely unchanged. Woolf has examined the cognitive aspects of this continuity of culture as resulting from the collective identity in the Greek language and common descent; Roman identity, in contrast, "was based to an unusual degree on membership of a political and religious community with common values and *mores* (customs, morality, and way of life)."[18] Yet, Romans had a profound respect for Hellenic culture. It was believed in Roman society that the Greeks invented civilization, *humanitas,* and had

[18] Woolf 1994, 120.

taught it to the Romans, who thenceforth were destined to civilize the world[19]; thus, the Romans both favored and rejected Hellenism. The most important thing about Greeks was their past—a sentiment which sparked the Greeks' investment in Atticism during the Greek imperial era, but also one which ever reminded the Romans of Greek decadence and their own moral aptitude to rule.

Sophists were essentially rhetoricians, who devoted themselves to studying, imitating, and teaching the skill of oratory as mastered in the classical period. They gained considerable prominence during the 1st and 2nd centuries C.E. due to their elaborate reenactments of historical speeches originally presented by Greek orators in the classical period. Although it is unclear whether Lucian himself was a sophist,[20] it is inferred from his *Dream,* or *Life of Lucian,* that he began his education in rhetoric after a disastrous premonition regarding entering the family sculpture business. Lucian then left his native Syria (which was highly influenced by Greek culture) in order to procure a Greek education (*paideia)* and fame. This education, particularly during the Greek imperial era, would have influenced Lucian to promote his own "Greekness" through Greek literary endeavors and language accuracy. Swain notes, "the importance of Atticism in language and literature [during the second sophistic] is simply that language was the best way to reproduce the past in a culture that placed such enormous value on the classical heritage and on oral communication."[21] Lucian was definitely aware of the elite's emphasis on language, and several of his works express his self-consciousness in speaking and composing in Greek. These

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[19] i.e. Cicero, *Ad Quintum fratrem* 1.1.27; Woolf 1994, 119.

[20] Jones 1983, 9-14.

[21] Swain 1996, 21.

anxieties are illustrated in *Double Indictment*, where personified Rhetoric makes charges against "the Syrian," who has abandoned Rhetoric due to the fact that she became "too boisterous" (31). Lucian continues by claiming that (now being almost 40 years old) he intends to give up rhetoric and devote himself to philosophical dialogues, implying that if Lucian was indeed a sophist, it was while writing his earlier works and not the dialogues that will be discussed in this paper. Further strengthening Lucian's self-consciousness was the fact that he was (according to his own self-identification) Syrian and "barbarian," and does not seem to have been entirely accepted by his elite contemporaries.[22] Yet, Swain has inferred that Lucian's self-consciously underlined exclusion from the Greek elite "might explain why [he] does stand as a critical commentator on the culture of his contemporaries, observing its strengths and weaknesses, praising its good points and merits, and relentlessly probing its vanities and pretensions."[23]

II. The Dialogues of the Courtesans

The *Dialogues of the Courtesans* is an example of a comic dialogue, a genre invented by Lucian that essentially combines New Comedy, which influenced Lucian's "low" culture characters, and dialectic, a genre type previously ascribed to philosophical discussion, but also used comically in the Menippean satire and possibly other kinds of texts that combined philosophical conversation and humor.

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[22] Swain 1996, 311, 299. Lucian, *Scythian* 9*; The Uneducated Book Collector* 19*; The False Critic* 1 and 11.

[23] Swain 1996, 311.

Gilhuly, in her study of the dialogues, claims that "by transferring dialogue from the mouths of men espousing philosophy to the mouths of courtesans discussing their quotidian experiences, Lucian effects a social inversion."[24] As a result, the courtesans of the dialogue present a complex subject, "engaged in a struggle between their subjectivity and the limitation imposed upon them by their profession."[25]

The context of Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans* typically involves conversations between two courtesans, a courtesan and her mother, or a courtesan and her client(s). The mood is often playful and theatrical, inviting the reader to laugh at the plights of a prostitute. The first dialogue introduces the recurring persona of the jealous courtesan, as Glycera explains to Thais that another courtesan, Gorgona, has stolen one of her clients away from her behind her back. Thais explains to Glycera that this sort of behavior is to be expected in this profession, but nevertheless ameliorates her companion's dilemma by criticizing Gorgona's appearance: "Her lips are livid and her neck is scraggly with the marks of veins on it, and she's got a huge nose!" (τὰ χείλη δὲ πελιδνὰ καὶ τράχηλος λεπτὸς καὲ ὶπίσημοι ἐν αὐτῷ αἱ φλέβες καῤὶ ὶς μακρά I.2).[26] The dialogue ends rather abruptly, with Glycera assuring Thais that her client is surely under a love spell cast by Gorgona's mother, a rumored witch. In this way, the components of this first dialogue are exemplary of Lucian's approach to the work as a whole. The courtesans are the force driving these

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[24] Gilhuly 2007, 62.

[25] Gilhuly 2007, 64.

[26] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.

short, dramatic episodes, and the tendency for their dilemmas to remain unresolved effectually lends itself to realism.

Given the genre's introduction to read these dialogues as snippets of real life situations, the reader is prepared to expect much talk about sex—which is, of course, the common source of exchange for a *hetaira's* income; however, direct mention of sexual intercourse only occurs in one out of the total fifteen dialogues—*Dialogue* V. There, Clonarium is eagerly questioning her fellow-*hetaira,* Leaena, about strange (καινά) rumors she's heard: "That the rich Lesbian woman Megilla loves you just like a man and that you live together (doing I-don't-know-what with each other!)" (τὴν Λεσβίαν Μέγιλλαν τὴν πλουσίαν ἐρᾶν σου ὥσπερ ἄνδρα καὶ συνεῖναι ὑμᾶς οὐκ οἶδ' ὅ τι ποιούσας μετ' ἀλλήλων, 5.1). Leaena refuses at first to answer, claiming that she is ashamed to speak of it, since it is unnatural (ἀλλόκοτον,[27] 5.1.4); Clonarium continues to pry about her friend's sex-life—assuming, of course, that Leaena remained in her passive sexual role—by demanding, "Tell me in what way she made her first advances to you, *and in what way you were persuaded*" (τοῦτο αὐτὸ καὶ διήγησαι, ὅπως μὲν ἐπείρα τὸ πρῶτον, ὅπως δὲ καὶ σὺ συνεπείσθης καὶ τὰ μετὰ ταῦτ, 5.2). Leaena finally gives in:

> At first, [Megilla and her partner Demonassa] were kissing me like men, not only attaching their lips closely with mine, but also opening their mouth, and they were embracing me and pinching my breasts. Demonassa even bit in the middle of kissing. I was not able to guess what was happening. In time, Megilla, now being somewhat hot, pulled off her wig, which was fitted and combed very realistically, and in time she seemed just like those strong athletes, having cut off all her hair, and after seeing this I was stirred up. She

[27] This term typically refers to 'something of unusual nature or form, strange, portentous'; of persons, it can mean 'utterly different from' (+gen.); of things, 'unwelcome, against the grain' (Liddell & Scott).

> said, "Leaena, have you ever seen so beautiful a young man?" "But I do not see a young man there, Megilla," I said. "Do not make me womanish," she said, "for I am called 'Megillus' and for a long time now I have been married to Demonassa, and she is my wife."
>
> Ἐφίλουν με τὸ πρῶτον ὥσπερ οἅ ἱνδρες, οὐκ αὐτὸ μόνον προσαρμόζουσαι τὰ χείλη, ἀλλ' ὑπανοίγουσαι τὸ στόμα, καὶ περιέβαλλον καὶ τοὺς μαστοὺς ἔθλιβον· ἡ Δημώνασσα δὲ καἔ ἰδακνε μεταξὺ καταφιλοῦσα· ἐγὼ δὲ οὐκ εἶχον εἰκάσαι ὅ τι τὸ πρᾶγμα εἴη. Χρόνῳ δή ἐ Μέγιλλα ὑπόθερμος ἤδη οὖσα τὴν μὲν πηνὴκην ἀφείλετο τῆς κεφαλῆς, ἐπέκειτο δὲ πάνυ ὁμοία καὶ προσφυής, καἐ ἰν χρῶ ᾧφθη αὐτὴ καθάπερ οἱ σπόδρα ἀνδρώδεις τῶν ἀθλητῶν ἀποκεκαρμένη· καἐ ἰγἐ ὠταράχθην ἰδοῦσα. ἡ δ῎Ω ,ἐ Λέαινα, φησίν, ἑώρακας ἤδη οὕτω καλὸν νεανίσκον; Ἀλλ' οὐχ ὁρἔ ,ῶφην, ἐνταῦθα νεανίσκον, ὦ Μέγιλλα. Μὴ καταθήλυνέ με, ἔφη, Μέγιλλος γάρ ἐρὼ λέγομαι καὶ γεγάμηκα πρόπαλαι ταύτην τὴν Δημώνασσαν, καἔ ἰστιν ἐμὴ γυνή. (5.3)

Then Leaena, quite perplexed by this anomaly: "Are you a cross-dresser?"..."Are you a hermaphrodite?"..."Did the gods do it?"

> "No, Leaena," she said, "I was born a woman just like the rest of you, but I have the mind and desire and all other things of a man." "And thus, is this desire sufficient for you?" "Submit yourself, Leaena, if you don't believe me, and you will realize there is nothing lacking from men; for I have something instead of a manly thing."
>
> Οὔκουν, ὦ Λέαινα, ἔφη, ἀλλἐ ἀγεννήθην μὲν ὁμοία ταῖς ἄλλαις ὑμῖν, ἡ γνώμη δὲ καἐ ἡ ἰπιθυμία καὶ τἆλλα πάντα ἀνδρός ἐστί μοι. Καί ἰκανὴ γοῦν σοι, ἔφην, ἐπιθυμία; Πάρεχε οὖν, ὦ Λέαινα, εἀ ἰπιστεῖς, ἔφη, καὶ γνώσῃ οὐδὲν ἐνδέουσάν με τῶν ἀνδρῶν· ἔχω γάρ τι ἀντὶ τοἀ ῦνδρείου. (5.4)

Then Megilla propositions Leaena for sex with supplication, a very expensive necklace, and finely woven linen, and proceeds to embrace her *like a man,* kissing her, seeming to enjoy herself immensely. "But what did she do?! Or how?!" (Τἐ ίποίει, ὦ Λέαινα, ἢ τίνα τρόπον; 5.4) Clonarium asks. But Leaena refuses to say—it's shameful (αἰσχρά).

The unusual circumstances of Leaena's narrative differentiate the character of Megilla from the other courtesans and this dialogue as a whole from the rest. First, Megilla is represented (or, represents herself) as a man, and in particular, a lustful

one. She only succeeds in sleeping with Leaena after taking the proper steps to establish her masculinity. After an evening's drinking party, hosted by the wealthy Megilla herself, Leaena, the hired musician of the evening, is convinced to sleep in bed between Megilla and Demonassa. As soon as she gets Leaena in bed with her, Megilla reveals her true sex-driven self: Megillus, the masculine form of Megilla. This shows that Leaena was previously unaware of Megilla's homosexuality, which in turn demonstrates Megilla's conscious "otherness." She could not unveil her sexuality until her prey had been consumed by wine and lured into the privacy of the bedroom. There, she takes complete control of the situation: Leaena is confused, curious, and easily persuaded by Megilla's supplication and expensive gifts, and she blatantly propositions Leaena for sex with vulgar, erotic language that refers exclusively to bodily pleasures—with no hint of affection or promise of future companionship. She is driven by one thing only—sexual desire—which cannot be satisfied without behaviors that ape conventional expectations of male habits. Indeed, Leaena only consents once she has been assured of Megilla's masculine dominance, and this is important, for it reiterates Leaena sexual passivity. Leaena [throws] her arms around [Megilla] "as though she were a man"—not a woman—and she relates none of her own actions, but only those of the truly *active* participant, Megilla: "she went to work, and she was kissing me and panting, and seemed to be taking an exceeding amount of pleasure from it" (εἶτ' ἐγὼ μὲν ὥσπερ ἄνδρα περιελάμβανον, ἡ δὲ ἐποίει τε καὶ ἰφίλει καῆ ἰσθμαινε καὶ ἰδόκει μοι ἐς ὑπερβολὴν ἥδεσθαι V.4).

Megilla's assumed masculinity refers us back to Parker's active/passive grid. First, as Parker points out, Greek and Roman sexuality is rigidly phallocentric, and thus defined by the masculine/active sexual role.[28] The female is without a phallus, and is therefore, by nature, passive—or, able to be penetrated. According to David Halperin, Greek (and similarly Roman) sexual discourse is phallic, "because (1) sexual contacts are polarized around phallic action—i.e., they are defined by who has the phallus and what is done with it; (2) sexual pleasures other than phallic pleasures do not count in categorizing sexual contacts; (3) in order for a contact to qualify as sexual, one—and no more than one—of the two partners is required to have a phallus... [I]n the case of sex between women, one partner—the 'tribad'—is assumed to posses a phallus equivalent [an overdeveloped clitoris] and to penetrate the other."[29] Thus, sexual intercourse without penetration is indefinable—there must be an active penetrator (the male) and a passive penetrated partner (the female).

In Parker's article, however, he attempts to demonstrate how cunnilingus inverts the active/passive system by claiming that it is "an essentially feminine activity," a "monstrosity in the system," and a type of "failed intercourse."[30] He makes this claim on purely heterosexual circumstances by asserting, "for a man to give oral sex is for him to be passive with respect to his mouth."[31] But if we look closer at Lucian's representation of the act of cunnilingus in a female homoerotic

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[28] Parker 1997, 48.

[29] Halperin 1990, 166 n.83.

[30] Parker 1997, 52.

[31] Parker 1997, 52.

context, we can see how the active/passive conditions persist, and how the tribadic woman remains dominant while providing oral pleasure.

In Phaedrus' *Fabulae*,[32] he explains how *tribades* and *molles* came into being, and assigns a phallus to the *tribas*:

> "It was the same Prometheus, molder of ordinary people from clay, who as soon as he caused trouble was reduced to unfortunate circumstances. When, working through the day, he had formed the genital parts that modesty hides —separately, so that he might soon attach them to their proper bodies—he was suddenly invited to dine by Bacchus. There, having soaked his veins in much nectar, he returned home late with staggering step. Then, owing to drowsy wits and drunken error, he wove the maiden's part into the breed of men, and attached masculine members to women. Therefore lust now enjoys perverted pleasure."

Rogavit alter tribadas et molles mares
quae ratio procreasset. etxposuit senex:
"idem Prometheus, auctor vulgi fictilis,
qui simul offendit ad fortunam frangitur,
naturae parties vests quas celat pudor
cum separatim tot finxisset die
aptare mox ut posset corporibus suis
ad cenam est invitatus subito a Livero,
ubi inrigatus multo venas nectare
sero domum est reverses titubanti pede.
tum semisomno corde et errore ebrio
implicuit virginale generi masculo
et masculine membra applicuit feminis.
ita nunc libido pravo fruitur gaudio."
(Phaedrus, *Fabulae 4.16)*

Then, as if one masculine appendage wasn't enough, the previous poem illustrates how Prometheus derived the female tongue from masculine parts:

> Lately he formed the tongue of woman from the molding of the male organ.

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[32] Translation by Hallett. Hallett 1997 uses these passages to claim a Roman denial of female homoeroticism: "Indeed, by crediting the origin of *tribades* to a Greek figure form the remote past, Phaedrus further dissociates females who engage in same-sex love from the actual and contemporary human scene. What is more, the implication that tribads actually possess male organs serves to distance them even more from any claim to present-day Roman reality" (256). Her reading, although not taking into account the sexual inferences these poems make on the *tribas*, emphasize the inherent "otherness" of the *tribas*, which will be explored later in the paper.

From this source obscenity has attracted a bond of kinship by marriage.

Formavit recens
A fictione veretri[33] *linguam mulieris.*
Adfinitatem traxit inde obscenitas.
(Phaedrus, *Fabulae* 4.15)

Thus, from this curious representation, a *tribas* possesses, in fact, two phallic instruments: the additional organ (as mentioned by Halperin previously, the overdeveloped clitoris), and the original feminine device, the tongue.

Going back to *Dialogue* V, we can see how Lucian fits his account of sexual intercourse into the active/passive system, first because Megilla identifies as male, and second, because she assures Leaena that she is "as good as any man" (οὐδὲν ἐνδέουσάν με τῶν ἀνδρῶν, 5.4) for she has a "some manly-thing" of her own (ἔχω γάρ τι ἀντὶ τοὰ ὔνδρείου, 5.4). The actual identification of this substitute is never revealed, but it seems that it could be one of three things: a dildo, an overdeveloped clitoris, or Parker's forgotten appendage—the tongue. Other points in the dialogue hint that the tongue is the favored implement: Leaena recalls the sensuousness of Megilla and Demonassa's kisses, how they kissed "*like men*—not simply bringing their lips to mine, but opening their mouths a little" (ὥσπερ οἄ ἰνδρες, οὐκ αὐτὸ μόνον προσαρμόζουσαι τὰ χείλη, ἀλλ' ὑπανοίγουσαι τὸ στόμα, 5.3). In this statement, Leaena (again) admits her passivity—she was penetrated by the tongue of the active Megilla.[34]

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[33] *Veretrum, N.*, by definition, means 'the external (*in quots.* male) sexual organ' (Liddell and Scott). The usage in this text refers to the male organ.

[34] It should be noted that cunnilingus between women would not have been a foreign concept in antiquity; Martial refers to it specifically (7.67).

There is a sentiment (especially in Roman oratory) that the mouth is both subject to defilement and an active agent of obscenity by overindulgence in eating or drinking, speaking profanely, and participating in oral sex. The impure mouth, the *os impurum*, is often referred to in Ciceronian orations in order to draw attention to his opponent's inherent depravity and the way in which the mouth has created this characteristic through its excessive condemnable behaviors.[35] In speaking against Marcus Antonius, Cicero says (in perfect use of *praeteritio*):

> But let us forget now about his shameful and disgraceful deeds. They are the sort of things which I am not able to honorably speak of, but you are much more free (to speak of these things), since you have allowed these things (to be done) on you, the things which you cannot hear from a modest enemy.
>
> *sed iam stupra et flagitia omittamus; sunt quaedam quae honeste non possum dicere, tu autem eo liberior quod ea in te admisisti quae a verecundo inimico audire non posses. (Phil. 2.47)*

The things which Marcus Antonius have allowed to be done to him (*ea in te admisisti)* involved playing the 'submissive' role in oral sex with his younger lover Curio, and Cicero is using the agency of Antonius' tongue in this 'polluting' sexual act as a means by which to reveal his immoral character. In short, it seems clear that one of the most predominant means for the defilement of the mouth is through oral sex, particularly cunnilingus, and the *os impurum* is strongly connected with oral sexual acts.

The appropriation to Megilla of the morally "loose" *os impurum* can be strengthened not only by means of her sexual acts, but also in respect to her rather foul, outspoken language—perhaps the two acts even coincide. Indeed, both the sexual circumstances and the erotic language of *Dialogue* V distinguish it from the

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[35] See esp. Cicero, *Vat*. 39, *Verr*. 2.3; Corbeill 1996, 99-127; Richlin 1992, 26-31.

other dialogues. None of the other dialogues refer so specifically to a sexual act, nor do the other courtesans speak to one another in the same manner about their sexual relations with male clients as Leaena and Clonarium speak about Leaena's relationship with Megilla. Instead, we see that the actions of the courtesan characters are driven by economic gain (either of their own accord or at the command of their mothers) or, more predominantly, by love. Indeed, a large number of the dialogues present love-sick courtesans or clients who will stop at nothing to win back their lovers, and this recurring persona compels the reader to focus on the courtesans' *emotional* relationships, rather than sexual.

An example of the greedy courtesan type is found in *Dialogue* XIV, where Myrtale and her former client, Dorio, are having a quarrel. Dorio is furious because Myrtale has shut him out of her house and is now taking another lover, despite the "generous" gifts he has given her, but Myrtale claims that he has given her nothing worthy of her affection. Dorio continues to recall the various goods he brought her from abroad, which "all together add up to the entire wealth of a sailor" (ταῦτα πάντα συντεθέντα οὐσία ναύτου ἀνδρὸς ἦν XIV.3). But all of Dorio's presents simply don't measure up to the dresses, jewelry, and tapestries given by Myrtale's new client, and the dialogue ends with her snide remark, "Oh what a happy girl, whoever keeps you as a lover, Dorio! For you'll bring her onions from Cyprus and cheese whenever you sail back from Gythium!" (Ὦ μακαρία ἐκείνη, ἥτις ἐραστὴν σῷ ,έ Δωρίων, ἕξει· κρόμμυα γὰρ αὐτῇ οἴσεις ἐκ Κύπρου καὶ τυρόν, ὅταν ἐκ Γυθίου καταπλέῃς XIV.4).

In *Dialogue* VII, Musarium's mother is scolding her for falling in love with one of her clients, Chaereas, and neither exacting pay from him, nor accepting other lovers. She says, "Aren't you ashamed that you're the only courtesan without an earring, a necklace, or a lace wrap?" (οὐκ αἰσχύνῃ μόνη τῶν ἑταιρῶν οὐκ ἐλλόβιον οὐχ ὅρμον οὐ ταπαντινίδιον ἔχουσα; 7.2) And Musarium replies, "What of it, mother? Are they happier than I am or prettier?" (Τί οὖν, ὦ μῆτερ; ἐκαῖναι εὐτυχέστεραί μου καὶ καλλίους εἰσίν; 7.2). Despite her mother's insistence that their economic stability is dependent on her success as a courtesan, Musarium insists on seeing Chaereas alone. To her, love conquers all, but whether Chaereas' affection is reciprocal remains ambiguous.

In *Dialogue* IV, the courtesan Melitta asks her fellow courtesan Bacchis if she knows any Thessalians, or witches, so that she may buy a love spell to win back the affection of her beloved client Charinus. Charinus and Melitta broke up because the jealous Charinus saw "Melitta loves Hermotimus" written as a graffito in the Kerameikos, the cemetery just outside of Athens. Melitta, quite distraught from her unfortunate loss, exclaims, "I would gladly give up these dresses and all this gold, if only I could see Charinus returning to me, and hating Simiche as he now hates me" (θαιμάτια γὰρ καὶ τὰ χρυσία ταῦτα προείμην ἡδέως, εἰ μόνον ἴδοιμι ἐπ' ἐμὲ αὖθις ἀναστρέψαντα Χαρῖνον μισήσαντα Σιμίχην ὡς νῦν ἐμέ IV.1). So Bacchis tells her of a Syrian woman who performed a spell for her, and she explains the procedure to Melitta, who then urges that the witch be fetched for her at once. In this episode, Melitta clearly chooses love over money, and based on the jealous actions of Charinus, he also appears to have a strong emotional attachment to Melitta.

In *Dialogue* VI we get the instructions on How-To-Be-A-Good-Courtesan. Corbyle is essentially forcing her daughter, Corinna, into prostitution, being driven by her own rapaciousness. She encourages Corinna to be like Lyra, the exemplary wealthy courtesan, who is the epitome of passivity. Lyra "never throws herself at men," (μήτε αὐτή ἐπιλαμβανομένη τῶν ἀνδρῶν) nor does she "talk too much," (οὔτε πλέον τοῦ δέοντος φθέγγεται) and "when its time for bed, she'll never do anything course or slovenly, but her only aim is to attract the man and *make him love her*" (ἐπειδὰν κοιμᾶσθαι δὰ ,ἐησελγὲς <οὐδὲν> οὐδὲ ἀμελὲς ἐκείνη ἄν τι ἐργάσαιτο, ἀλλὰ ἐξ ἅπαντος ἓν τοῦτο θηρᾶται, ὡς ὑπαγάγοιτο καὶ ἐραστὴν ποιήσειεν ἐκεῖνον 6.3). Clearly this dialogue should be titled, "How To Be Penetrated (No Dirty Talk, Please)." Yet, Lucian paints an interesting, rather pitiable, picture of the path to courtesanship in this dialogue, for Corinna cries at the thought of entering the profession, and the reader is compelled to pity her misfortune brought on by her own mother's greed. Indeed, the subjects and circumstance of this dialogue are particularly complex, and will receive further attention later in the paper.

Coming back now to the tribadic figure, Megilla, we can see that her compulsions are quite different from those of the other courtesan characters, because she is represented as possessing one dominant character trait—lustfulness—whereas the courtesan characters are granted significantly more psychological complexity. The abnormality of a woman possessing this sort of sex drive attests to the "otherness" of Megilla in the context of these dialogues. She exhibits the promiscuity and dominance of active male partners, but her vulgar language remains unique, at least in Lucian's dialogues, from even the male clients. In *Dialogue* XI,

Thryphena and her client for the evening, Charmides, are in bed together, but no action has ensued—in fact, Charmides is crying. When Thryphena asks him what the matter is, he exclaims, "Eros has destroyed me, and I am no longer able to endure this misery" (Ἔρως με ἀπόλλυσιν, ὦ Τρύφαιν, καὶ οὐκέτ' ἀντέχω πρὸς τὸ δεινόν XI.1). He is in love with another courtesan, a certain Philematium who is nicknamed the "Trap". Thryphena explains that this woman is an imposter—45 years old with a skin disease, and Charmides claims that if this is really true, then they should now forget about Philematium and enjoy their time together. Thus, compared to the actions of a male client, we can see that Megilla's actions remain overtly vulgar and emotionally detached. The image invoked in *Dialogue* XI, of a courtesan consoling a crying, love-struck male client, stands in stark contrast to Megilla's predatory attack on the drunk (and presumably senseless) Leaena.

It is curious that, out of the fifteen total fabricated conversations between courtesans, *Dialogue* V contains both the only homosexual character and the only mention of sex—in fact, the erotic language in V is not even attributed to the courtesan characters, but is the relayed indirect speech from Megilla—courtesans do not speak so boldly. This vulgar language juxtaposed with the pathetic, emotional longings of the courtesans (and also the male clients) reflects the sexual dominance of the *tribas* in comparison to the sexually passive *hetaira*, and is Lucian's technique of distinguishing the "otherness" of this female homosexual by highlighting her sexual voraciousness void of love and emotion. The courtesans, who are the pitiable result of their mother's greed and who suffer the unfortunate circumstances of unobtainable love, invoke pathos in the reader, their characterization directly

contrasting with the single-mindedness of the lustful Megilla. This sentiment invoked by Lucian's courtesans ultimately refutes Parker's argument, "The sexually active woman is the prostitute or the adulteress, who inverts the values of the society. She hunts and seeks out men to give her pleasure and uses them as toys... Such a woman is a monster who violates boundaries... She will desire to penetrate, but cannot be truly (phallically) active. It is clear, then that any woman who enjoys sex is by definition abnormal and masculine."[36] On the contrary, the *hetairai* in Lucian's *Dialogues* actively seek no sexual pleasure at all, but rather money, companionship, and love. Leaena, the only courtesan in the text who divulges her sexual episodes, expresses neither pleasure from the experience nor the desire to penetrate others, because the courtesan is the ultimate *passive* female. However, the simplistic notion that the courtesan demonstrates passivity in sexual practice stands in contrast to her autonomous agency, which consequently presents a more complex figure than the limited identification based solely on sexuality.[37]

a. *New Comedy*

Representations of courtesans exhibiting psychological complexity and reserved (passive) speech lacking in the suggestive qualities exhibited in the speech of the *tribas*, Megilla, are found in other literary sources, as well—most notably in Roman New Comedy and in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae*, where courtesan characters are similarly elevated in the text and attributed direct speech. The fact that these

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[36] Parker 1997, 58-59.

[37] This distinction between sexual passivity and agency will be returned to later in the thesis.

two qualities (psychological complexity and restraint) continue to be emphasized in these texts further contradicts the claim that prostitutes are sexually active "monsters," and accentuates the richness and predominate admiration of these figures in contrast to the one-dimensional persona of the representation the lesbian figure, Megilla. An additional indication of the courtesan's misidentification as "monster" is the fact that the courtesans in New Comedy and the *Deipnosophistae,* as also in Lucian's *Dialogues*, are granted the capacity to give and receive affection, and are often the object of much devotion, rather than a mere object in exchange for sex.

The scenarios of Lucian's *Dialogues* recall many of the narratives of Roman New Comedy (2nd cent. BCE), where courtesan characters are often put center stage. The expansive literary tradition of courtesans (which Lucian would have been familiar with) are particularly evident in this genre, considering that New Comedies themselves were predominately Latin variations or direct translations of Greek comedies from the 4th century.[38] A *meretrix* (the Latin equivalent of Greek *hetaira*) is typically classified in these comedies as either "one who acts in 'good faith' and truly loves the *adulescens* (young man), [or] one who acts in 'bad faith,' who does not truly love anyone but plays everyone for money."[39] Yet, regardless of the character traits of the courtesans, their clients seem to be compelled to support them much more out of love than from sexual desire. Duncan claims, in support: "What seems especially marked is the *adulescens'* use of the language of love and trust, rather than that of commercial sex; the ideology of Roman Comedy makes the *meretrix emotionally*

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[38] For the influence of Greek comedies on Roman New Comedy (Plautus, in particular), see Anderson 1993.

[39] For more on the characterization of prostitutes in New Comedy, see Duncan 2006, 257.

important."[40] Thus, the representation of the courtesan in New Comedy corresponds with the characterization of Lucian's courtesans, who lack the emphasized lustfulness of active female partners and possess the emotional capacity to give and receive affection.

The courtesan characters in New Comedy are often granted a considerable amount of agency, for their plights propel the storylines and they typically achieve what they desire in the end, whether they are deceitful or more virtuous. In Terence's *Eunuchus*, the courtesan Thais would be labeled a "good-faith" prostitute, since her affection for the *adulescens* appears to be genuine, even though the plot is driven by her desire to gain patronage and economic stability. Phaedria, her citizen suitor, delivers several dramatic monologues expressing his love for Thais and his simultaneous mistrust of her claimed affection. He tells her that he wishes her to be with him completely, and to become his soul, as much as he is hers (*[velim] mecum tota sis; / meus fac sis postremo animus, quando ego sum tuos.* 195-196). He wants Thais to love him alone, but this is against her deviant nature: to settle for one lover would be to conform to social and gender norms, and to give up the economic freedom she is able to acquire by keeping several clients at a time; yet, this inaccessibility is what makes her desirable.

The plots of Plautus' *Bacchides* and *Truculentus* feature what would be categorized as "bad faith" courtesans, yet they remain the objects of their client's undying love and devotion. In the *Bacchides*, the storyline is driven by the manipulations of two money-hungry courtesans, two sisters both named Bacchis.

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[40] Duncan 2006, 268.

Even though they are quite aware of the sisters' scheming, the *adulescentes*, Pistoclerus and Mnesilochus, comply with the courtesans' every demand. The wealthy *parentes* of the youths, after realizing that they have been cheated out of money by the tricks of the Bacchis sisters, angrily confront them, but they, too, become entrapped by the beauty and charm of the courtesans. Thus, both fathers and sons are invited into the Bacchis sisters' home, and the deceitful courtesans receive more than what they hoped for—the patronage of two men each.

The courtesan Phronesium in *Truculentus* is the greedy plot-turner who deceives three love-blind clients. Her name alone proves her cunning, as it derives from the Greek *phronesis*, meaning "good sense." Diniarchus is her first victim, who opens the play lamenting the heartaches of his love: "An entire life is not enough for a lover to really learn, as long as he is learning it, how many ways he may die for love" (*non omnis aetis ad perdiscendum sat est amanti, dum id perdiscat, quot pereat modis* I.i.1-2). Next comes the dimwitted neighbor boy, Strabax, and finally the soldier Stratophanes, who fight over Phronesium's affection with money (to the delight of Phronesium), but ultimately decide that sharing her is better than losing her altogether. Phronesium leaves delighted that all her scheming has worked in her favor, and ends the play by inviting the audience to seek out her affection: "If anyone is inclined to do [anything concerned with love], let me know" (*si quis animatust facere, faciat ut sciam* V.74).

a. *Athenaeus*

Athenaeus, a contemporary of Lucian, provides one of the most extensive accounts of *hetairai* in his *Deipnosophistae*, or *The Learned Banqueters*, where they are predominantly praised for their intellect and hold significant relationships with their clients. This representation further reiterates the fact that courtesans are psychologically complex and "normal" (meaning, sexually passive) female figures in contrast the image that emerges from the "grid" system. Athenaeus composed the *Deipnosophistae* in the late 2nd century CE and in this way the work problematizes historical analysis similarly to Lucian's *Dialogues*, due to the fact that it also assumes the nostalgic sentiment of the classical period so inherent in Second Sophistic-style literature in the Greek imperial period. The work takes on the form of a philosophical dialogue in a symposiastic setting, recalling such 4th century works as Plato and Xenophon's *Symposium*; thus the conversation flows by a series of speeches from the banqueters themselves, offering reproach or praise on a given topic. By means of literary quotations from authors of all sorts of genres—history, comedy, drama, poetry, prose—the banqueters make their case while at the same time flaunting their intellectual aptitude.

Book XIII, also titled, "Peri Gynaikôn" (On Women), is largely an "invective" and "encomium"[41] of courtesans, rather than, as the title suggests, a conversation more broadly on women. Cynulcus, the philosopher, begins by condemning the "elaborate devices" (παρασκευὴν, 568a) of high-price mistresses (μεγαλόμισθοι, literally, "receiver of high pay"). The use of this identification deliberately rejects the enigmatic and euphemistic term "hetaira" by focusing on their commodity status

[41] These are McClure's terms.

rather than their importance in symposiastic settings. He elaborates on the deceitfulness of their appearance, namely the tricks they use to care for their bodies (568a-d), and even blames courtesans for causing wars by instigating strife among men (570a). He praises instead the simplicity of the public brothels, and ends with the advice to "limit your embraces to the ladies who run the houses and not squander unprofitably the cash belonging to your sons" (Διὸ συμβουλεύω σοι… τὰς ἐπί οἰκημάτων ἀσπάζεσθαι καὶ μὴ καταναλίσκειν εἰς οὐδὲν δέον τὰ τῶν υἱῶν κέρματα, 568d).

Myrtilus, the grammarian, offers the return encomium, drawing attention to the fact that there are "real" professional *hetairai* who are able to preserve a friendship free from treachery, and these are the sort he continues to praise. Myrtilus' dialogue offers many cases where courtesans are the object of great devotion from their clients, and are also given the capacity to return their affections. In retort to Cynculcus' condemnation of courtesans' outer beauty, he recalls the love of certain courtesans by men of historical significance (575-578), such as orators, generals, kings, poets and philosophers. By doing so, he emphasizes the esteem such prominent men held for their mistresses and their ability to assume powerful positions, for many of these women were bestowed with great privilege by them, or even assumed dominion for themselves. For example, he recalls, "And did not the courtesan Agathocleia hold sway over King Ptolemy Philopator—she who overturned his throne entirely?" (τοῦ δὲ Πιλοπάτορος βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου οὐκ Ἀγαθόκλεια ἡ ἑταίρα ἐκράτει, ἡ καὶ πᾶσαν ἀνατρέψασα τὴν βασιλείαν; 577a) and, "Eumachus of Neapolis, in the second book of his *Histories of Hannibal,* says that Hieronymus, the

tyrant of Syracuse, took to wife one of the prostitutes from a brothel, named Peithô, and made her queen" (Εὔμαχος δὲ ὁ Νεαπολίτης ἐν τῇ φησι τὸν τυραννήσαντα Συρακοσίων ἀγαγέσθαι γυναῖκα μίαν τῶν ἐπ' οἰκήματος προεστηκυιῶν, Πειθὼ ὄνομα, καὶ ἀποδεῖξαι βασιλίδα 577a). He also spends a considerable amount of time on the affairs of Hellenistic monarchs, particularly those of Demitrius, which demonstrates further how the courtesan is an object of love and affection: "And was not Demetrius Poliorcetes passionately in love with the flute-girl Lamia, by whom he also had a daughter, Phila?... Demetrius was also in love with Leaena, also an Athenian prostitute..." (Δημήτριος δ' ὁ Πολιορκητὴς οὐ δαιμονίως ἦρα Λαμίας τῆς αὐλητρίδος, ἐξ ἧς ἔσχε καὶ θυγατέρα Φίλαν; … ἦρα δὲ καὶ Λεαίνης καὶ αὐτῆς ἑταίρας Ἀττικῆς ὁ Δημήτριος… 577c).

Myrtilus provides a considerable number of examples of the witticisms of courtesans, particularly those of Mania and Gnathaena, whose stories he recalls from the comic poet Machon's *Chreiae* (Anecdotes). These witticisms help nuance the argument that courtesan characters (as they are represented in the literature included in this paper) are sexually passive, based on the fact that their language is not overtly suggestive to the point of aggressive seduction. This claim should not lead to the assumption, however, that courtesans are not sexual beings, for the courtesan's sexual passivity does not necessarily infer a limited amount of individual agency, nor suggest involuntary conquest by the dominant partner.[42] In variation to the speech of Lucian's courtesans, the witticisms of the *hetairai* in Myrtilus's dialogue openly refer

[42] The issue of sexual passivity vs. individual agency will be returned to later in the paper.

to sexual circumstances, but, as mentioned previously, highlight the keen intellect of the courtesans. Such a remark from the courtesan Mania is elaborated thus:

> To set Mania apart that she was witty, Machon records the following about her: "The pancratiast Leontiscus was once in love with Mania, and kept her for himself alone as a wedded wife. But later he perceived that she was being seduced by Antenor, and was very angry. But she said: 'Let your soul not have a care for any of these things; for I just wanted to see and understand what two athletes, victors at Olympia, could do, blow by blow, at the same time in a single night.'"
>
> Ὅτι δ' ἦν καὶ ἀστεία τις ἀποκρίνασθαι, τάδε περὶ αὐτῆς ὁ Μάχων ἀναγράφει·
>
> Τῆς Μανίας ἤρα Λεοντίσκος ποτὲ
> ὁ παγκρατιαστὴς καὶ συνεῖχ' αὐτὴν μόνος
> γαμετῆς τρόπον γυναικός. ὑπὸ δ' Ἀντήνορος
> μοιχευομένην αἰσθόμενος αὐτὴν ὕστερον
> σφόδρ' ἠγανάκτησ'. ἡ δὲ "μηθέν, φησί, σοί,
> ψυχή, μελέτω· μαθεῖν γὰρ αἰσθέσθαι θ' ἅμα
> Ὀλυμπιονικῶν νυκτὸς ἀθλητῶν δυεῖν
> πληγὴν παρὰ πληγὴν τί δύναταί ποτ' ἤθελον." (578f)

And the playwright Diphilus, "he, being the most esteemed of all [of the courtesan Gnathaena's] lovers (and he eagerly took notice of her showing affection)" (τιμώμενος μάλιστα τῶν ἐρωμένων (ἤσθε δ' ὑπ αὐτῆς ἐκτενῶς ἀγαπώμενος) 579e) after drinking her chilled wine (cooled by the snow he gave her as a gift), he exclaimed, "I swear by Athena and the gods, Gnathaena, that your wine-cellar is admittedly cold" (νὴ τὴν Ἀθηνᾶν καὶ θεούς, ψυχρόν γ', ἔφη, Γνάθαιν', ἔχεις τὸν λάκκον ὁμολογουμένως 580a). And Gnathaena shrewdly replied, "Yes, for we always throw into it the prologues of your plays" (τῶν δραμάτων γὰρ ἐπιμελῶς εἰς αὐτὸν αἰεὶ τοὺς προλόγους ἐμβάλλομεν 580a).

III. The "Otherness" of Tribades

The representation of the *tribas* in a single-minded pursuit toward sexual fulfillment can be seen in striking opposition to the ideals of male homosexuality, which often attributes love (*eros*) towards homosexual relationships and desire (*epithumia*) for heterosexual relationships. Goldhill states, "This aggressive separation of 'higher emotional feelings' from heterosexual physicality is then traced with great verve in the distinction between 'mere copulation' between the genders, and the true and noble desire of male for male."[43] Foucault claims that "the Greeks could not imagine that a man might need a different nature—an "other" nature—in order to love a man"[44]; but, when two women perform intercourse, "by some artificial means or other, a woman contrives to usurp the role of the man, wrongfully takes his position, and possesses another women."[45] The male sees the *tribas* as a threat to the power his gender allows him. She is *gender deviant*—becoming dangerously close to masculine domination. To the inherently active/phallic male, female homoerotic sex is enigmatic and unnatural, because it lacks a definitive phallic, penetrating partner. Male homoerotic sex, on the other hand, is not considered unnatural, because there is an explicitly defined active and passive, penetrating and penetrated partner.

Latin literary references to women with homoerotic tendencies are predominately Hellenic (as, for example, Ovid's depiction of Sappho discussed below) and/or masculine in nature, an anomaly which Hallett has recognized as a deliberate denial of Roman reality. Hallett notes, "This widely held Roman notion that female homoeroticism could not be expressed without masculine sexual parts

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[43] Goldhill 1995, 148.

[44] Foucault 1985, 192.

[45] Foucault 1986, 24.

and practices is, of course, itself a denial of biological and social reality. After all, the Roman use of *tribas*, a term from a Greek word meaning, "to rub," itself acknowledges that women were capable of providing mutual pleasure by friction alone."[46] Thus, it appears that a majority of male authors were either unwilling or unable to conceptualize sexual intercourse without a phallus, which then explains the masculinizing of the *tribas*. One female partner must be given an "other" nature—the nature of the other gender—in order to "normalize" the sexual encounter and bring the act to completion.

The denial of female homoerotic intercourse is particularly evident in *Dialogue* V. First, Megilla takes on the appearance of a muscular young athlete—shaved head and all—and has to convince Leaena that she has a penis substitute—a "manly thing" (ἄνδρειον)—of her own before Leaena can submit to her (after all, Leaena must be assured that *she* will be penetrated). Further, the context of the dialogue alone proves an ignorance of the mechanics of female homoerotic sex, as Clonarium is so curious to find out the dirty details, which she herself cannot conceptualize. Yet, here, as elsewhere, the *tribas* is masculinized, hence the possibility of sex between two entirely feminine partners is denied. The identification and operation of this "manly" substitute is never revealed.

a. Literary Representations

Male anxieties about sexually active *tribades* are ubiquitous in literary sources where such gender-deviant women are portrayed as abnormal and voracious. An

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[46] Hallett 1997, 268.

example of this attitude is found in the guise of a pun in Plautus' comedy, *Truculentus* (262).[47] Astaphium, a female servant of the courtesan Phronesium, begs Truculentus to calm his rage (*comprime sis eiram)*. The primary meaning of *comprimere* is "to calm or control," but its secondary meaning is "(of a man, male animal) to have intercourse with." Truculentus, mistaking *eira (*archaic for *ira,* rage) for *era* (mistress), retorts, "Indeed, by Hercules, you who are accustomed, go fuck your mistress, you who impudently persuade a country man through contemptible disgrace (*eam quidem hercule tu, quae solita es, comprime / impudens, quae per ridiculum rustico suades stuprum)*—the maid replies, "I said anger, not mistress." This dialogue, however comedic, explicitly associates female homoeroticism with perverse masculine conduct.

Martial's anxiety takes a rather violent turn as he describes another *tribas*, Philaenus, who is an archetypical example of such gender deviancy. She exercises like a man, eats like a man, and fucks like a man—she "penetrates" eleven girls a day (*undenas dolat in die puellas*, 67.3). Her behavior is identical to a man's, but for her to conduct herself with such brazenness is a threat—a sentiment which is evident by Martial's explicit repulsion. Parker uses this passage to support his claim that cunnilingus is a passive sexual act, since Martial affirms that it is not "manly,"[48] but as examined previously, there is something distinctly masculine about the female tongue, which would insinuate that cunnilingus is a conceivable form of female homosexual penetration (despite the imitation) thus reaffirming the sexual dominance of Philaenus.

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[47] Lilja 1983, 28, 32.

[48] Parker 1997, 52.

b. *The Ovidian Sappho*

Sappho, the Archaic poetess from the Greek island of Lesbos, is an unusual figure who attracts much attention in scholarship due to her poetry's homoerotic undertones.[49] Her enduring "othered" representation and the consequential anxieties of her behavior come together in Ovid's *Heroides.* The *Heroides* are a series of letters written in the voice of a forsaken heroine to her heroic lover;[50] curiously enough, the fifteenth letter is written in the voice of Sappho to Phaon, a mythic boatman who is said to have received eternal youth and beauty from Aphrodite after carrying her to Asia Minor without charge.[51] The Sappho-Phaon love story is historically complicated, since Sappho's sexuality has so long been debated and satirized; in fact, the introduction of Phaon as Sappho's male lover perhaps even emerged as a comic invention of Menander,[52] as a satirical partner for a woman-lover.

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[49] For modern scholarship on Sappho, her poetry, and sexuality, see: Lardinois 1994; Parker 1993; Winkler 1990.

[50] The epistles in the *Heroides* include such literary and mythical characters as Penelope to Odysseus, Dido to Aeneas, Ariadne to Theseus, and Medea to Jason.

[51] The authenticity of Ovid's authorship of this epistle is debated, but for the purpose of my argument I am following Gordon, who claims Ovid as author. For arguments against the attribution to Ovid, see Tarrant 1981 and Knox 1995.

[52] Gordon 1997, "In the late fourth century BCE, Menander cast Phaon as a runaway lover in a (nonextant) comedy" (277).

Further, it seems possible that in his *Dialogues*, Lucian originated Megilla from Lesbos as a further indication of her homosexuality.[53]

The Ovidian Sappho is remarkable within the *Heroides* as a whole, and functions much like Megilla in Lucian's *Dialogues*: her language is erotic and provocative in a way that is not the case in the language of other female characters, and this vulgarity is attributed to her masculinity and sexual dominance. Her characterization is also unique to other representations of Sappho in literature, mostly due to the fact that Ovid has chosen to address her homosexual past as partly definitive of her infamy, instead of ignoring it altogether.[54] In order to prove her faithfulness to Phaon, the Ovidian Sappho renounces her promiscuous past (15-20):

> Neither do the girls of Pyrrha, nor do the girls of Methymna,
> Nor do the rest of crowd of Lesbian women satisfy me;
> Anactoria is worthless, bright Cydro is worthless,
> Atthis is not pleasing to my eyes, as before,
> And the other hundred girls whom I loved not without reproach:
> o worthless man, what has belonged to many women, you alone possess.
>
> *nec me Pyrrhiades Methymniadesve puellae,*
> *nec me Lesbiadum cetera turba iuvant;*
> *vilis Anactorie, vilis mihi candida Cydro,*
> *non oculis grata est Atthis, ut ante, meis,*
> *atque aliae centum quas non sine crimine amavi:*
> *improbe, multarum quod fuit, unus habes.*

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53 Gilhuly 2006, 208. Clonarium explicitly associates female homosexuality with Lesbos while questioning Leaena about her relationship with Megilla: "They say there are masculine women of that sort on Lesbos, not wanting to associate with men, but only with women, as if they themselves were men" (τοιαύτας γὰρ ἐν Λέσβῳ λέγουσι γυναῖκας ἀρρενωπούς, ὑπ' ἀνδρῶν μὲν οὐκ ἐθελούσας αὐτὸ πάσχειν, γυναιξὶ δὲ αὐτὰς πλησιαζούσας ὥσπερ ἄνδρας V.2).

54 Gordon 1997 points out that Heroides XV is the oldest unobscured commentary on Sappho's homoeroticism and is also the earliest source in which she renounces her love for girls (277).

Despite Ovid's condemnation of Sappho's homosexual past, his mention of it highlights her inherent "otherness" and draws attention to her lustful and sexually dominant nature. Sappho continues tantalizing her letter's recipient with the proposition for sex when she recounts (43-50):

I was singing, I remember—lovers remember all things—
you were seizing kisses from me,
and these you were praising also, and I was pleasing in every way—
but then especially, when the work of love happened.
Then our wantonness was pleasing you more than usual,
and our rapid movement and suitable words in jest,
and the fact that, when the pleasure of both of us had mingled,
languor was deep in our wearied bodies.

cantabam, memini—meminerunt omnia amantes—
oscula cantanti tu mihi rapta dabas.
haec quoque laudabas, omnique a parte placebam—
sed tum praecipue, cum fit amoris opus.
tunc te plus solito lascivia nostra iuvabat,
crebraque mobilitas aptaque verba ioco,
et quod, ubi amborum fuerat confusa voluptas,
plurimus in lasso corpore languor erat.

She artfully reminds her lover of her sexual expertise (she was pleasing *in every way*) while alluding to the fact that she desires further sexual relations; also, the vulgarity in this passage is a case in point, as she calls attention to the mixing of bodily fluids in intercourse. Then, she recounts her dreams (124-134):

but sleep does not hold its joys long enough,
often I seem to burden your shoulders with my neck,
often I seem to place myself under you;
I recognize the deep-tongue kisses, which you joined,
and you had been accustomed to give and receive them suitably.
Sometimes I caress you, and call out similar words of truth,
and my lips stay awake for my senses.
It shames me to tell the rest, but everything happens,
and it pleases, and I am not able to be dry.

sed non longa satis gaudia somnus habet,
saepe tuos nostra cervice onerare lacertos,
saepe tuae videor supposuisse meos;
oscula cognosco, quae tu committere lingua

aptaque consueras accipere, apta dare.
blandior interdum verisque simillima verba
eloquor, et vigilant sensibus ora meis.
ulteriora pudet narrare, sed omnia fiunt,
et iuvat, et siccae non licet esse mihi.

Sappho is unable to stay "dry" (*siccae*) at the climax of her dream, when "all things happen" (*sed omnia fiunt)*. It is clear, from this graphic confession, that Sappho has had a "wet dream," thus she is not only admittedly aroused but has also acquired a phallus.[55] This leads us to the construction of the Ovidian Sappho as a male lover, an argument supported by Gordon.[56]

In Gordon's construction of the "male" Sappho, she claims, "Ovid's Sappho is so masculine that when she chooses a man, she chooses a boy. In pursuing a pretty boy, Sappho conforms to the Greek stylistics of male sexual behavior as formulated by Dover (1978) and Foucault (1985): men pursue not other men, but boys (or women, or slaves). A man's partner, whether male or female, submits. Thus Sappho entreats Phaon to resume his passive role: *huc ades inque sinus, formose, relabere nostros! / non u tames oro, verum ut amere sinas,* 'Glide back to my arms, O beautiful, / not to love but to *let yourself be loved'* (95-96)."[57] The characterization of Phaon also places him neatly into the role of the former pederastic lover. First, he has none of the heroic traits of the other letter's addressees, and therefore Sappho finds nothing with which to praise him besides his good looks (at 23 she compares him to Apollo, "*fies manifestus Apollo*"), and she claims that he is "not yet a man, no longer a boy, a suitable age" (*o nec adhuc iuvenis, nec iam puer, utilis aetas,* 93). At the same time as she glorifies Phaon's

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[55] See Verducci 1985 and Gordon 1997.

[56] Gordon 1997.

[57] Gordon 1997, 284.

youth, she criticizes her old age and ugliness—which further places her in the role of the *erastes*, the older, experienced lover—but she compliments this by exalting her poetic genius (*si mihi difficilis formam natura negavit / ingenio formae damna repende meo,* 31-32).

Similarly with Lucian's Megilla, the erotic language of this masculine Sappho is unique to her epistle. The other heroines draw attention to their sexual *in*experience and chastity; Sappho not only admits her promiscuity (recall the "hundred other girls," 19), but indulges in all the erotic details. Another way in which Sappho's language distinguishes her from the other heroines is found in the way she continuously praises Phaon's appearance while criticizing her own. This behavior is sexually aggressive, for the flattery is used in an attempt to attract her lover and draws attention to her sexual pursuit. While the other heroines "frequently allude to their own physical humiliation and repeatedly draw the reader's gaze to their inert, trembling, or grief-stricken bodies, ...Sappho reverses the pattern"[58] because she rejects the gaze of the lover. The other heroines are weak and passive, but Sappho is ready to seduce her young lover with her poetic and sexual skills.

From this interpretation of Sappho, it is clear that she is represented as masculine and sexually *active*, but the question remains as to whether Ovid draws an emphasis on the bodily reactions of the character in an attempt to emulate Sapphic poetic discourse, or whether this erotic language is what epitomizes the "unnatural" behavior of female homosexuals. In her book, Lindheim draws attention to the instances where Ovid is intentionally drawing upon elements in Sappho's poetry to

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[58] Gordon 1997, 280-1.

construct her voice in the *Heroides.* For example, in fragment 31 (7-16), Sappho lists the ways in which her body is affected by love:

> For when I look at you briefly, then for me speaking
> nothing comes out any longer,
>
> but my tongue is struck silent, a delicate
> fire straight away runs underneath my skin,
> my eyes see nothing, my ears whirr
> like a top,
>
> and sweat pours down me, a trembling
> creeps all over, greener than grass
> am I, a little short of dying
> I seem to be to myself.
>
> ὡς γὰρ ἔς σ' ἴδω βρόχε', ὥς με φώναι-
> σ' οὐδ' ἒν ἔτ' ἔκει,
>
> ἀλλὰ κὰμ μὲν γλῶσσά <μ'> ἔγε, λέπτον
> δ' αὔτικα χρῷ πῦρ ὑπαδεδρόμηκεν,
> ὀππάτεσσι δ' οὐδ' ἒν ὄρημμ', ἐπιρρόμ-
> βεισι δ' ἄκουαι,
>
> κὰδ δέ μ' ἴδρως κακχέεται, τρόμος δὲ
> παῖσαν ἄγρει, χλωροτέρα δὲ ποίας
> ἔμμι, τεθνάκην δ' ὀλίγω 'πιδεύην
> φαίνομ' ἔμ' αὔτ[ᾳ.

In response to this fragment, Lindheim notes, "We get a very detailed and specific list of the narrator's various, externally visible, bodily reactions; we are compelled to consider her in a very physical way."[59] Similarly, Ovid's Sappho continuously exposes her body's responses, and Ovid appears to be making a conscious choice to emulate the original Sapphic voice.

Even though Ovid makes a bold attempt to recreate Sappho, he ultimately fails. The Ovidian Sappho's bodily reactions are now the consequences of her sexual

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[59] Lindheim, 146-7.

desire, rather than love and longing. Choosing such erotic language for a confessed homosexual (despite the renouncement of such) effectively accentuates her sex-driven nature and alienates her from the other naturally *passive* heroines. However much the Ovidian Sappho condemns her (homo)sexual promiscuity, she will always be the product of these actions: sex is what defines her. Ovid is attempting to reconstruct not only the voice of Sappho, but of a female homosexual—a masculine, sexually *active* woman of an "other" nature. As a result, the erotic language of *Heroides* XV is at the same time *specifically* Sapphic and *generically* homoerotic.

Ovid makes another reference to a female homosexual in his *Metamorphoses*.[60] Ligdus threatens his wife, Telethusa, that if she bears a daughter, the infant will be put to death. So when Telethusa gives birth to a girl, Iphis, she deceives Ligdus by claiming she has born a son, and then continues to raise her in disguise. Years later, Iphis is betrothed to the maiden Ianthe, and after lamenting to the gods about her plight of unnatural love, she is metamorphosed into a boy. Iphis' language in the passage is neither erotic nor masculine; instead, she draws attention to her cursed and unnatural misfortune: "would that they had at least given me a natural and customary sickness" *naturale malum saltem et de more dedissent, 1053)*. Her characterization, quite different from Sappho, is pitiful, and she is granted release from her "animalistic" behavior[61] when the gods change her gender. She is not eroticized because she did not choose her "other" nature—she is the wretched result of her mother's deceit.

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[60] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IX.960-1148.

[61] Iphis claims her love for Ianthe is unnatural because female animals do not desire other female animals (Ovid, IV.1054-1058).

c. Visual Representations

The same sentiment—that female homoerotic sex requires a "manly" tribadic partner—is evident in the material record. Two "sexual vignettes" from apodyterium 7 in the Suburban Baths at Pompeii (fig. 1, 2) illustrate sexual relations between women, although such depictions are rare in Greek and Roman iconography and thus there is comparatively limited information about the visual experience of these images. The Suburban Baths (lying just outside the Marine Gate) are themselves unique, due to the fact that they the only Pompeian baths that do not segregate men and women.[62] This is important when reconstructing the visual experience of the erotic art of the Baths, since the images to be discussed (which tend to satirize conventional sexual roles) very likely evoked different responses for each gender. Clarke notes, "Here we may have the only concrete space in the ancient world—specifically because its decoration was meant for both sexes—to reconstruct a female gaze."[63]

The sexual vignettes (eight of the original sixteen scenes surviving) were painted over shortly before the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE with Fourth Style motifs. This repainting, although preserving the majority of the sexual vignettes beneath, still adheres to some of the images, making them difficult to decipher. Such is the case for Scene V (fig. 3), which is so obscured by the repainting that the sex of one of the partners is debated. This figure stands to the left looking down at the

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[62] Clarke 1998, 213; Jacobelli 2005, 18.

[63] Clarke 1998, 239.

genitals of the woman reclining to the right. The woman wears a breast band, and has her left leg lifted above her head, resting it on the shoulder of the figure to the right. The position is a common one for heterosexual couples, and Jacobelli interprets the standing figure as male by comparing this scene with other images featuring a man and a woman in this sexual position.[64] Following Clarke's interpretation, however, it seems clear that the vignette depicts two women copulating, first, because the hairstyles of the two figures are the same (one commonly found in sexual representations during the Augustan period), secondly, because the skin tones of both figures are pale in contrast to the other darker-skinned male figures represented, and finally, because the artist seems intent on increasing the perversion of the images as they read from left to right.[65] The sexual position of the two figures in Scene V, if interpreted as a man and a women, appears relatively inoffensive in comparison the previous image of a woman receiving cunnilingus from a man and the following image, which illustrates a threesome between a woman and two men.

Unfortunately, due to the obscurity of the image, it is impossible to discern exactly what sexual maneuver the two women are performing. What is most interesting, however, is that the women are placed in a common heterosexual pose, where "the man (or in this case, the standing female figure) raises the woman's leg to increase the degree of penetration."[66] This is important because it appears to reflect the literary representations of female homoerotic sex discussed previously, where

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[64] Jacobelli 47: fig. 37; Naples Archaeological Museum, inv. 27697.

[65] Clarke 1998, 227. Clarke follows the reading of Kepke 1994.

[66] Clarke 1998, 228.

male authors deny the fact that two women are able to pleasure one another without the presence of a phallus. One partner (in this case, the standing figure) must be dominant and masculine for the act to be conceived.

The scenes from the Suburban Baths not only reiterate the required masculinity of one female partner in homoerotic sex, but also the vulgarity of the act—an attitude so apparent in the literary sources. Scene VII (fig. 4), the final image of sexual intercourse in the group, illustrates an orgy of four—two men and two women. A male figure on the left penetrates the other male, who is being fellated by a reclining woman who, at the same time, receives oral sex from the other woman at far right. This is the only known image in Greek and Roman art of two women performing cunnilingus,[67] and I think it is not a coincidence that the only depiction of the act also includes two men, for the phallus brings the act to completion. Clarke suggests that the female figures are prostitutes,[68] and that such a scene would amuse rather than shock ancient viewers—particularly women, who likely hired men and *women* to perform cunnilingus for a small price.[69] Yet, it is interesting to note how the male "penetrating" partner on the left mirrors the female partner performing

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[67] Clarke 1998, 236.

[68] Clarke 1998, 220-23, 36-7, bases this claim solely on the fact that the Roman aristocracy was particularly concerned with the purity of the mouth, and that no "freeborn" woman would dare speak of performing such an act due to the threat of *infamia*. In this way, the women in the scene were merely sex-workers performing for pay. I find that this identification lacks solid evidence, however, and that the issue of female identification in sexual representations deserves further inquiry that unfortunately extends the scope of this thesis.

[69] "Graffiti at Pompeii proclaim that male prostitutes were willing to perform cunnilingus on women for a price similar to that which female prostitutes requested for fellatio, between one and three asses. Perhaps detractors wrote these graffiti to debase their male enemies by saying that their tongues were for hire, or perhaps these graffiti reveal actual sexual practices." Clarke 1998, 225-226, 236-37. Varone 1994, 138.

cunnilingus on the far right. Continuing the interpretation of the "phallus-like" female tongue, the scene then presents a series of mirror images, the "penetrating" homoerotic partners on the outside, the "penetrated" homoerotic partners on the inside. Also, the fact that such an "impure" act is illustrated last in the series of sexual vignettes also highlights the viewer's conceived vulgarity of the act, for it stands in outrageous perversity compared to the tame initial image of a man and woman performing intercourse. Thus it appears that an "otherness" of intensified vulgarity is attributed to female homoerotic sex in the material record as well as the literary record.

IV. Conclusion: Sexual Passivity vs. Agency

This thesis thus far has focused on the literary representation of two seemingly distinct female figures, the courtesan and the lesbian, whose coexistence in a single text allows for a reevaluation of the assumptions about female sexual roles and male perceptions of each. Yet, the discussion should be taken further in order to make an important distinction between the sexuality and agency of these female figures. I will now argue that their representation complicates the presupposed gender roles underlying the structuralist's "grid." Referring to Parker's "Teratogenic Grid," I have attempted to refute the claim that prostitutes are *active* sexual "monsters." First, the sexual role of Leaena as evident in *Dialogue* V proves the sexual *passivity* of the courtesan in intercourse with the sexually *active* Megilla, and although there is no further mention of sexual intercourse in the dialogues, Leaena's behavior

with a dominant female homosexual lover is surely undifferentiated from her behavior with male partners. Also, the absence of erotic language and sexual propositioning on the part of the courtesan in the dialogues verifies that she is passive—able to be seduced, and able to be penetrated. Parker states that the sexually active woman will "desire to penetrate, but cannot be truly (phallically) active,"[70] and he was right. The *tribas*, who is truly represented as the ultimate active woman, desires to penetrate, but the prostitute, the ultimate *passive* woman, desires to be penetrated.

But matters of agency are more complex than they at first appear: sexual habits and psychological dispositions are not identical and should not be assumed as such. The agency of the courtesan is particularly complex, for although she is sexually passive, she is in no way submissive in nature. On the contrary, a vast majority of the courtesan figures discussed in this thesis are clearly active agents in their own lives, in direct contradiction to the image evoked by certain orators[71] of the good housewife secluded in the *oikos* under the authority of her husband. The courtesan's self-mastery presents an intricate female subject—altogether unique, but most clarified in her comparison with the Sophist.

a. The Courtesan and the Sophist

As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, Second Sophistic literature is characterized by deliberate Atticism, by the Greek elite's investment in emulating

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[70] Parker 1997, 58.

[71] See, for example, Lysias *Oration* I, where Euphiletus evokes the image of a "pious wife" and "well-ordered household" in his defense in order to promote his own virtue.

their classical past. With this resurgence of "Greekness" came the resurgence of the courtesan as a literary figure (who first appears in literature from the sixth century BCE), but in a way suitable towards the philosophical and societal concerns of the Sophists themselves. McClure states:

> As literary figures, hetaeras were uniquely adapted to the Second Sophistic milieu. Their chameleon-like status as both Asiatic and Attic, their pervasive association with urban life, as well as their widespread and continuous appearance in rhetorical and comic genres throughout the Greek tradition made them well suited to conveying contemporary concerns with cultural identity, *paideia*, and tradition.[72]

Their marginal social status and generally foreign identity would have perhaps appealed to Lucian, in particular, since he himself identified as "barbarian," and an outsider to his learned Greek circle.

The courtesans discussed in this paper, particularly from the *Dialogues of the Courtesans* and the *Deipnosophistae,* are in a similar way explicitly characterized as, or encouraged to cultivate, the traits of philosophers. In fact, the areas of acclaim for Myrtilus's courtesans in Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* and for Lyra in Lucian's *Dialogue* VI bring to mind the instructions Socrates gives to Theodote in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, and it is not unlikely that Lucian and Athenaeus were making a deliberate reference to this classical text. In all three instances, courtesans display the art of conversation and moderation, which are the conscious endeavors of *male* philosophers. For example, Socrates places importance on proper, refined speech when he tells Theodote:

> "And inside [your body] you have a soul with which you thoroughly learn what glance may please, *what words delight,* and that it is necessary to gladly welcome your client."

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[72] McClure 2003, 32.

> ἐν δὲ τούτῳ ψυχήν, ᾗ καταμανθάνεις καὶ ὡς ἂν ἐμβλέπουσα χαρίζοιο καὶ ὅ τι ἂν λέγουσα εὐφραίνοις καὶ ὅτι δεῖ τὸν μὲν ἐπιμελόμενον ἀσμένως ὑποδέχεσθαι. (III.xi.10)

Similarly, Corbyle emphasizes the importance of speech when describing the success of the courtesan Lyra:

> "Also, she doesn't talk too much or make fun of any of the company..."
>
> καὶ οὔτε πλέον τοῦ δέοντος φθέγγεται οὔτε ἀποσκώπτει ἔς τινα τῶν παρόντων… (VI.3)

And Myrtilus' encomium of courtesans in the *Deipnosophistae*, as elaborated previously, spends a considerable amount of time praising the witticisms and intellect of these women. Then, concerning moderation and self-restraint, Socrates advises:

> "Then, you should call to mind those men, while they are wanting you, with the most moderate relationship, and do not appear to be willing to take pleasure but flee from them, until they want you as much as possible."
>
> ἔπειτα τοὺς δεομένους ὑπομιμνήσκοις ὡς κοσμιωτάτῃ τε ὁμιλίᾳ καὶ τῷ μὴ φαίνεσθαι βουλομένη χαρίζεσθαι καὶ διαφεύγουσα, ἕως ἂν ὡς μάλιστα δεηθῶσι· (III.xi.14)

Corbyle and Myrtilus also elaborate on the moderation of exemplary courtesans, associating such behavior with eating and drinking:

Corbyle: "If ever she takes a fee for going out to dinner, she doesn't drink too much—for that's ridiculous, and men hate those sort of women—nor does she fill herself up with food in a tasteless fashion—but picks up the food with her finger-tips, eating quietly and not stuffing both cheeks full, and she drinks quietly, not with her mouth wide open but rather restraining herself."

> ἢν δέ ποτε καὶ ἀπέλθῃ ἐπὶ δεῖπνον λαβοῦσα μίσθωμα, οὔτε μεθύσκεται—καταγέλαστον γὰρ καὶ μισοῦσιν οἱ ἄνδρες τὰς τοιαύτας—οὔτε ὑπερεμφορεῖται τοῦ ὄψου ἀπειροκάλως, ἀλλὰ προσάπτεται μὲν ἄκροις τοῖς δακτύλοις, σιωπῇ δὲ τὰς ἐνθέσεις οὐκ ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρας παραβύεται τὰς γνάθους, πίνει δὲ ἠρέμα, οὐ χανδόν, ἀλλ' ἀναπαυομένη. (VI.3)

Myrtilus: "Also, Eubulus in *The Hunchback*, when bringing up a well-behaved prostitute, says: 'She dined so properly! Not like other women, who fill their jaws with leeks and loudly devour meat in a shameful fashion; but from each portion she would take a small taste, as if she were a Milesian maiden.'"

Εὔβουλος δ' ἐν Καμπυλίωνι κοσμίαν ἑταίραν παράγων φησίν·
ὡς δ' ἐδείπνει κοσμίως,
οὐχ ὥσπερ ἄλλαι τῶν πράσων ποιούμεναι
τολύπας ἔσαττον τὰς γνάθους καὶ τῶν κρεῶν
ἀπέβρυκον αἰσχρως, ἀλλ' ἑκάστου μικρὸν ἂν
ἀπεγεύθ' ὥσπερ παρθένος Μιλησία. 571.f

The attribution of male, "high culture" qualities to the socially deviant courtesan creates, as Gilhuly has pointed out, a complex subject in terms of both gender and genre.[73] Yet, Gilhuly interprets Lyra's "good courtesan" characteristics as simply a prescription for her objectivity:

> "The image of Lyra that emerges it that of an almost complete nonentity who projects a self only in economic terms... There is a proliferation of negatives and alpha-privatives that combine to form an image of the successful courtesan as an a-subject. Lyra is an object, a reflection. There are ways she does not act. She acts in ways that others want. Krobyle tries to teach her daughter to be a no-one."[74]

I argue, on the contrary, that these remarkably "masculine" efforts assumed by the courtesans discussed are an attribution of agency. Their employment of self-restraint indicates that they are in control of themselves and their actions. They are the agents of their own relationships and wealth, and act in the ways that benefit *themselves*, not her clients. This is particularly evident in the last quote attributed to Socrates (*Mem.* III.xi.14), where he provides Theodote with the "upper-hand" of her relationships. She is advised to show a "reluctance to yield," to employ self-restraint, in order that she may gain as much as possible from her suitors. In this way, she is in control of her own success, though subject to male whims and desires. These male qualities attributed to the courtesan further confirm the distinction between sexual habits and

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[73] Gilhuly 2006, 276; 2007, 64-68.

[74] Gilhuly 2007, 78.

psychological disposition, for they grant her agency, but at the same time her ultimate aim in employing these traits is to resume her passive sexual role—"to make him love her."[75]

On the other hand, Megilla, as well as the other *tribades* we have examined, are attributed masculine characteristics and resume the active sexual role. With this masculinity comes a considerable amount of *sexual* agency, but her authority disappears outside of the bedroom. She is represented as a single-minded creature in a pursuit to penetrate, and nothing more. The courtesan, however, is not definable by her sexual role, nor by any other category. She could be a greedy plot-turner, a witty conversationalist, a defiant lover, and a jealous girlfriend. She has been granted, along with a personal agency, a literary agency, and Lucian's comedic dialogues form yet another genre where these subjects form a life of their own.

The masculine traits and agency attributed to courtesans in literature urges us to rethink ideas about gender and sexual roles. To be sure, the distinction between active and passive partners is necessary for the sexual act to be conceived (a rather black-and-white distinction of phallic or not), but gender roles are less definitive. For example, many of the courtesans discussed in Lucian, Athenaeus, and New Comedy are granted a considerable amount of power over their male clients solely based on emotion, on the fact that the clients are hopelessly, or sometimes blindly, in love with them. Yet, this control does not encourage the reader (or the audience, in comedy's case) to assume the courtesan is *sexually* dominant or penetrating. Further, the witticisms of Athenaeus' courtesans explicitly refer to sexual acts and draw attention

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[75] Lucian, *Dial.* 6.3.

to their apparent enjoyment of the act, but this is not pointed out to condemn her "monstrous" sexuality, nor again is the reader encouraged to perceive her as sexually dominant. In continued contrast of gender normatives, the male clients are even sometimes represented as helpless or overly emotional (we are reminded of Charmides, heartbroken and weeping in bed with Thryphena), but their sexuality is presumed to remain active.

The only figure who is denied a flexible identity, however, is the *tribas*. *Tribades* are abnormal in their sexual activity and so their masculinity must be accentuated. In this way, their "active" sexuality becomes definitive of their persona, and nothing more. They can never be represented as pitiable (as the courtesans and heroines are) because their "masculine" sexual activity (their perceived ability to penetrate) threatens to usurp the sexual power of the male. Their sexual deviance classifies them as "monsters," yet, at the same time, their masculinity allows for their promiscuity, because this is the admissible nature of men. Therefore, the question is whether the promiscuity of the *tribas* is a part of her "unnatural" conduct, or whether her promiscuity is an attribute of her masculinity. I propose that promiscuity and masculinity coincide, and the erotic language and sexual propositioning of the masculine tribadic characters examined provides evidence for such. These female homosexuals are *allowed* to speak openly about sex and to proposition others, because it expresses their sexual dominance, however "othered," and reaffirms their position as seducers.

The courtesan characters discussed in this thesis remind us that the "desire to be penetrated" is not what defines them. They are sexual objects, to be sure, but the

way in which they are characterized in Lucian's *Dialogues,* the *Deipnosophistae,* and in New Comedy confirms that sex is secondary to them. They seek economic stability and independence, but they also seek love, and in these texts they are awarded the capacity for affection. Nowhere do we find the voracious "monster" Parker speaks of, for this is the role of the *tribas*, the unnaturally active woman. The *tribas* is a woman who violates her sexual boundaries; she threatens the male, and is therefore composed by male authors as monstrous. The courtesan is a woman who violates her social boundaries; she is rebellious against the social norms attributed to women, choosing a life quite different from the well-behaved housewife, and is therefore attractive to men. Two rebellious women, with one major difference: the courtesan remains passive, in whatever sexual circumstance, and as a result, her male master rewards her with an eternal gift: a human persona, a voice.

So what has changed after challenging Parker's taxonomy? The "grid" encourages us to codify, but doesn't allow us to do so in the end. Although the *tribas* is made to fit the classification of the "Abnormal Female," the courtesan is neither normal by social conventions, nor abnormal in sexual practice. This intricate figure, so central in the classical literary tradition, rejects an identification based on sexuality alone, and further challenges the concept of such categorization altogether. The elusive nature of the courtesan, then, should not be seen as simply an "inversion" in the system, but rather, a welcome complexity—an encouragement to keep reading between the lines that have categorized her.

Images

Figure 1: Building plan of Pompeii with the Suburban Baths at the southwest entrance

Figure 2: Plan of Suburban Baths

Figure 3: Two women copulating, Pompeii, Suburban Baths, apodyterium 7, Scene V (62-79 C.E.). Photo Michael Larvey.

Figure 4: Foursome of two men and two women, Pompeii, Suburban Baths, apodyterium 7, Scene VII (62-79 C.E.). Photo Michael Larvey.

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La Grande Odalisque, Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, 1867, Musée du Louvre RF 1158. Courtesy of Artstor.